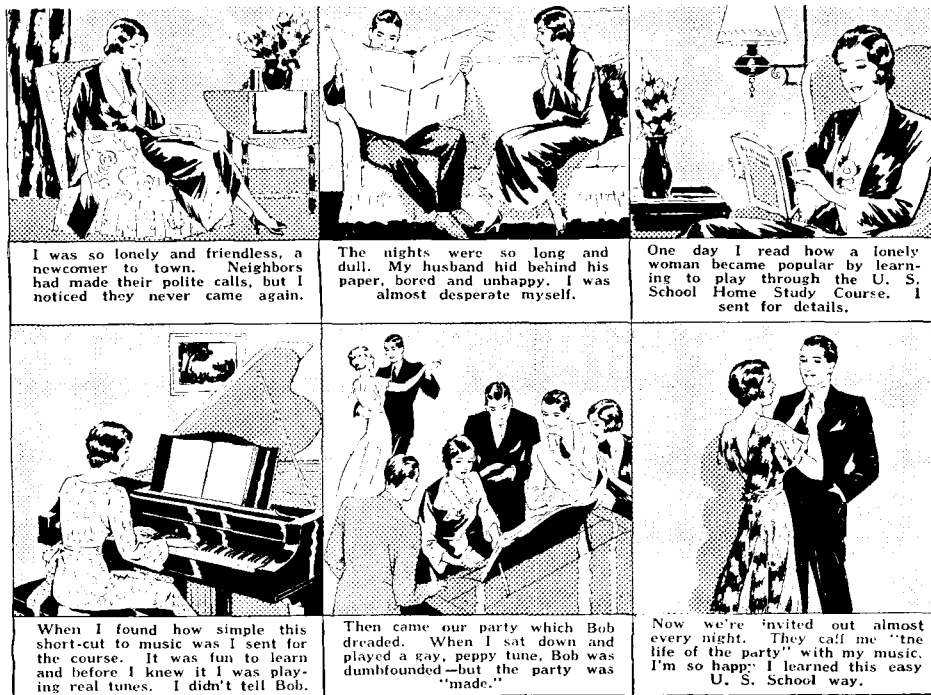


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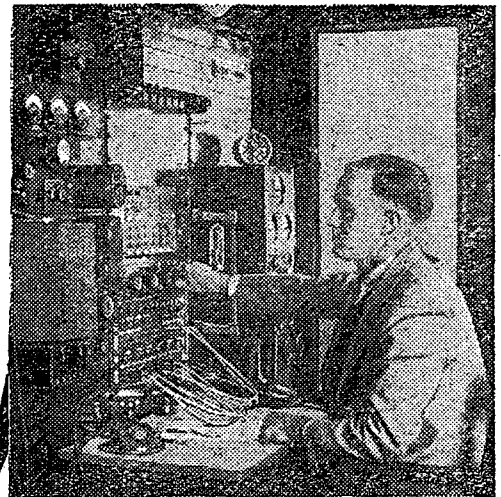
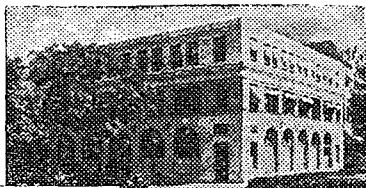
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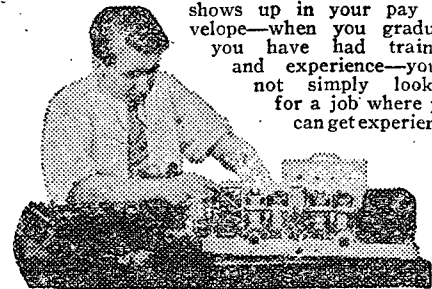
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AMAZING STORIES

Science Fiction

Vol. 7

January, 1933

No. 10

In Our Next Issue

BEYOND THE END OF SPACE, by John W. Campbell, Jr. We are sure that our readers will be glad to get one of Mr. Campbell's interplanetary stories in which this author pre-eminently excels.

BORNEO DEVILS, by Murray Leinster. Nothing is to be said in praise of this story beyond the fact that it may rank as one of the very best of a best author. It reminds one of Rudyard Kipling in its description of the Far East.

THE TREASURE OF THE GOLDEN GOD, by A. Hyatt Verrill. The vivid presentation of the jungle life of South America by one of the leading archaeological explorers will be highly appreciated by our readers. Mr. Verrill is a voluminous author and a long-time favorite with AMAZING STORIES readers. (Conclusion.)

THE TOMB OF TIME, by Richard Tooker. In this story we are transported into a wonderful primeval world. Strange adventures are vividly described by a prominent author.

FLAME-WORMS OF YOKKU, by Hal K. Wells. This story is devoted to strange beings on a distant satellite visited by explorers from our earth with a Martian pilot. It is a very novel presentation of life on a distant world.

And other unusual science fiction

In Our January Issue

The Treasure of the Golden God
(A Serial in two parts) Part I

By A. Hyatt Verrill..... 870

The Pool of Death

By Bob Olsen..... 890

The Last Earl

By Franklin W. Ryan..... 917

Omega, the Man

By Lowell Howard Morrow..... 929

Delilah

By Margaretta W. Rea..... 942

Radicalite

By Richard Rush Murray..... 948

What Do You Know?

(Science Questionnaire)..... 954

Discussions..... 995

AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY

This issue of AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY will appear in late January. It will be for the seasons of Spring and Summer. Among the prominent authors contributing to it will be such favorites of our readers as: Stanton A. Coblentz, Bob Olsen, Abner J. Gelula and Ed. Earl Repp. In this issue John Thorpe Russel makes his debut with our readers.

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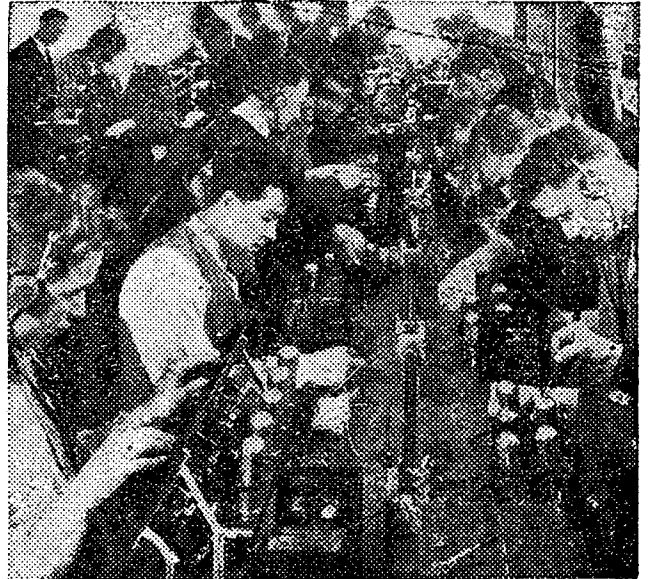
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| 18 1389 | 36 855 |
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| 20 1316 | 38 794 |
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| 22 1266 | 40 741 |
| 23 1235 | 41 709 |
| 24 1205 | 42 685 |
| 25 1176 | 43 658 |
| 26 1149 | 44 633 |
| 27 1111 | 45 606 |
| 28 1087 | 46 578 |
| 29 1053 | 47 556 |
| 30 1031 | 48 529 |
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AMAZING STORIES

THE MAGAZINE OF SCIENCE FICTION

VOLUME
7

JANUARY, 1933
No. 10

T. O'CONOR SLOANE, Ph.D., *Editor*

Editorial and General Offices: 222 West 39th Street, New York, N. Y.

Extravagant Fiction Today *Cold Fact Tomorrow*

Bridges and Tunnels

By T. O'Connor Sloane, Ph.D.

JOHAN RUSKIN was one of the great advocates of the beautiful in structures such as buildings of all kinds from palaces down to store fronts. While he seemed a bit eccentric in his writings which were quite voluminous, he was one of the great masters of the English language and a great deal is to be learned by reading his texts. Thus, he objected to the modern store front, in which a wall rising many stories, seems to be carried by a sheet of plate glass. Of course, we know that there is a steel girder which carries it, but his criticism from the standpoint of art in architecture is absolutely correct. Sometimes he seems to pay too much attention to very small details such as the designs of the capitals of the pillars of the Doge's Palace in Venice, but reading his works will often change one's trend of thought and operate to direct it in a good path.

It is not too much to say that great structures, bridges and buildings should be beautiful, as far as possible, and beauty is attained in these cases often by simplicity.

In former days, Switzerland and the United States were celebrated for their wooden bridges. These were carried by wooden trusses, usually horizontal, and in America, in order to protect them from the weather, they were boarded in and roofed over, and today the covered bridge is spoken of in the press, as one of the interesting relics of old times. The bridge of stone arches may be very beautiful, especially where either a true circle or a true ellipse gives the curve for the arches. The false ellipse struck from a number of centres and built up from arcs of circles, is not nearly so effective. Recently, when it was proposed to tear down Waterloo Bridge in London, the project was abandoned on account of the many protests received from the public, because the bridge seemed to be so beautiful.

When it came to bridging the East River at New York for the first time, the Brooklyn Bridge was erected with stone towers and a pure suspension effect, except for the necessary trussing to stiffen the roadway. This is one of the most beautiful bridges in the world, certainly of the steel bridges of the world. Other suspension bridges, which cross the East River and which followed this in later years, were built without regard to beauty and missed out on it badly.

Not far from the Metropolis there is what may be termed a bunch of bridges of steel truss construction with draws to let vessels go through, and which cross a rather narrow river. It would be very hard to find a more ugly set of structures than these bridges, all close together to intensify their unpleasant aspect.

In Great Britain the famous Forth Bridge excited great attention. Its cantilever trusses, quite gigantic in dimensions, are connected by a level truss, very small compared to them, and making a combination of great ugliness. Steel truss construction has done a great deal in the development of ugly bridges. It is very interesting to read about the original steel bridges. Robert Stevenson's Menai Straits Bridge was a simple rectangular tube, or box girder, through whose interior the railroad trains passed, and which gave a touch of deformity to the vicinity of its neighbor, Conway Castle.

Drawbridges have several objections. It takes a certain time to open and close them, and it is fair to say that large drawbridges are the acme of ugliness. They require men to operate them, and they are constantly, without intermission, in the hands of operatives, who have charge of them.

Many years ago great interest was excited in London by a tunnel which was put through under the Thames by Brunel, begun in 1825 and finished in 1843. This remained a curiosity for many years. Now the tunnel or tube for crossing under the waters of a river is beginning to supplant the old-time bridge. A tunnel takes care of itself, it never interrupts traffic, neither of vessels on the water above it nor of road traffic which goes on through it. As far as we know, tunnels last forever, and they have become so well recognized as an everyday affair, that they excite comparatively little attention and the building of a tunnel has become systematized, so that its operations go along as smoothly as if they were on the surface, and it may be built under many pounds pressure of air if water is present. The air pressure keeps the work free of water.

Of course, it goes without saying that more and more tunnels will be built in future years, as they provide for continuous traffic above and through them, there being no representative of the drawbridge to interrupt travel. Sooner or later the intersection of city streets, at least of the more busy ones, will be tunneled, and we may hope that the future generation will see the ugly drawbridge with its interruption of traffic and the expense of its operatives done away with and replaced by tunnels.

One criterion of beauty in structure, that is to say of architecture in its proper sense, is contained in the word "repose." The really beautiful buildings of the world have this effect upon the mind, and it is an open question whether the distinctively tall building can ever be given the feature of satisfied repose. We may hope that future generations will be blessed by the abolition of drawbridges which interrupt traffic both up and down rivers or across them and will have tunnels substituted therefor.

Serial in 2 Parts—Part I

The Treasure of the Golden God

By A. Hyatt Verrill

Author of "Bridge of Light" and Others

WE are sure that our readers will be delighted to see the name of A. Hyatt Verrill once more on our pages. This story, like many others by the same author, touches on South America and the Indians and the jungle. It tells of El Dorado and the golden treasures that Sir Walter Raleigh and so many others searched for in the New World in old times.

Illustrated by MOREY

WHAT do you make of those?" Thornton asked, as he tossed two bits of shining yellow metal upon the table. Belmont, the mining engineer, picked up the objects and examined them curiously. They were obviously gold; thin, crescent-shaped; perhaps two inches in length by an inch in width, and with small eyes or rings at the points of the crescents.

"They're gold of course," he replied. "Indian ornaments of some sort, I should say."

"Yes, you're right both times," laughed Thornton. "But do you realize that you are holding something which no white man since Raleigh's day has ever seen? Those things, Frank, are the 'gold moons' that Sir Walter Raleigh reported having seen in the noses of Guiana Indians."

"Jove, is that so!" exclaimed the other. "Discovered a lost tribe, eh? Bully for you. What were they, freaks, cannibals or Amazons?"

"Neither," declared the explorer, who had recently returned from months in the interior of Guiana and Brazil, and who was dining with his old college chum.

"The people who wore these," he continued, "are quite ordinary in as far as appearances go. But they prove that Raleigh was right, and, this is what may interest you, the tribe that uses the moons has a secret, unlimited supply of gold."

"What?" cried the engineer, instantly interested. "I suppose you mean that they have a rich placer mine. Now you're talking business, old man."

"I thought that would wake you up," laughed the explorer. "I can't say as to the placer. Did you ever hear of El Dorado and the City of Manoa?"

"Can't say I'm familiar with the town," replied Belmont, "but El Dorado was the chap who was supposed to

put on a spring suit of gold dust each year, and for whom Raleigh was searching."

"The same," assented Thornton, "and Manoa was the name of the city over which El Dorado was supposed to reign. According to Raleigh, Manoa was as nearly a 'golden city' as can be imagined,—walls, buildings, utensils all gold, and with gold nuggets the 'biggenesse of egges', to use Raleigh's words, to be picked up about the shores of the city's lake front."

"Fine!" ejaculated Belmont. "But don't try to make me believe you've found it or him. I'm ready to swallow almost any yarn about the places you've been, but those myths have been exploded long ago."

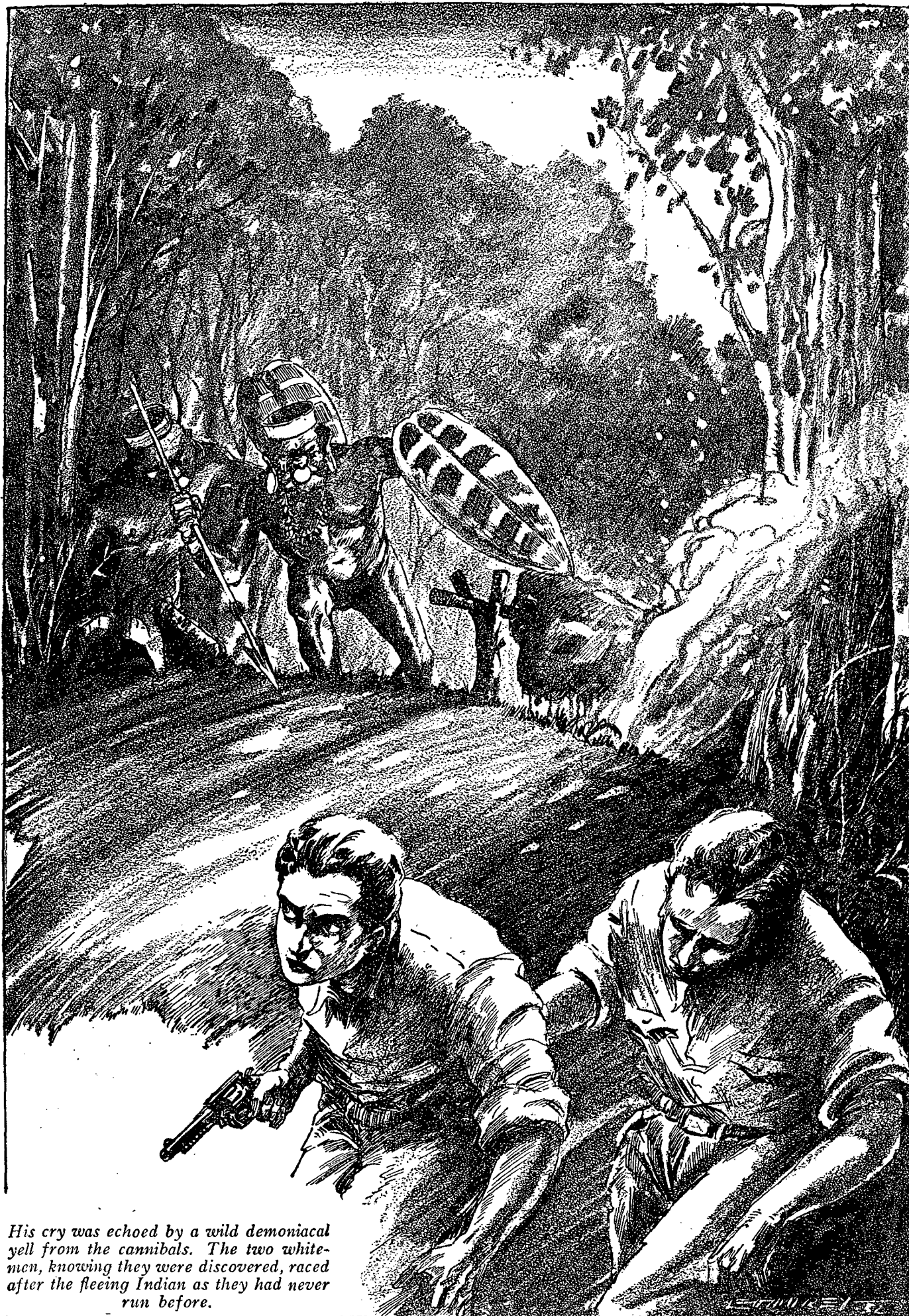
"Have they?" queried the other, raising his eyebrows. "So had the 'myth' of the gold moons—until I found these. No, Frank, I don't claim to have located Manoa or El Dorado, but just because they have not been found does not prove they do not or did not exist. Moreover,—" here the explorer lowered his voice and bent towards his companion, "I actually believe the Indians who use these ornaments *have* found Manoa!"

"Whew!" whistled the engineer. "Now let's get this straight, Ned. Let me have the whole thing in a nutshell. Then I can judge whether it's a pipe dream or is really a hard and cold proposition. Just give me the facts."

"Do you remember that I told you about a vast unknown district in the interior of Guiana which I intended to explore?" asked Thornton.

Belmont nodded.

"It's an area larger than Massachusetts and Connecticut together," he continued, "and I've always wanted to explore it. On this last trip I managed to reach that district. Started in from a Taruma village on the Essequibo, and crossed Savanna country to the Pianohottos, a tribe no white man had ever visited before.



His cry was echoed by a wild demoniacal yell from the cannibals. The two white-men, knowing they were discovered, raced after the fleeing Indian as they had never run before.

"They lived on the border of the unknown territory, but I couldn't induce one of them to go with me. Like all Savanna tribes they dreaded the forest and believed it full of devils and fabulous monsters. However, they told me of another tribe called Aurimeonas who were forest people and had a village on the edge of the Savanna. While we were talking, two of these tribesmen arrived. And the instant I saw them, I knew I'd made the discovery of my life. Both wore those gold moons in their noses. I had no trouble in getting the specimens by trade, but I couldn't get much information regarding anything in their district. You see it was a three-sided conversation. I spoke Akawoia to one of my Tarumas, he interpreted to the Pianohottos, and they had to retell everything to the Aurimeonas. But I did discover that they had plenty of gold. The upshot of it all was that I made arrangements to go with them to their village, but, before we could start, the rains came on, my boat captain came down with fever, and I was forced to turn back."

"So that's all," commented Belmont. "Too bad; but I don't see as you have any very definite information, certainly not enough to warrant going after the supposed source of gold. Just because you find a couple of wild Indians wearing gold nose ornaments you mustn't jump to the conclusion that they've got a bonanza or that you have located Raleigh's mythical city. To finance an expedition on the strength of what you've told me would be the most hare-brained sort of a gamble."

Thornton smiled. "That, as a lawyer might say, is my only direct evidence," he said, "but there's something more. Raleigh, in his 'Discoverie of Guiana' says, 'bye the Wariemetona I hadde knowledge that on the heade of this ruler were three mighty nations which were seated on a great lake from whence this ruler descendeth and that if wee entered the land through the mountains wee should satisfy ourselves with golde'."

"Well, what of it?" demanded the other. "Maybe they told him and maybe they didn't. And if they did they probably lied or exaggerated."

"That's not the point," declared the explorer. "No one since Raleigh's day has ever seen or heard of the Wariemetonas in order to verify his statements. Now cudgel your brains, old man, and see if you catch my drift. Do you notice anything familiar about that name—Wariemetona?"

Belmont wrinkled his brows and thought deeply. "Why, no—" he began, and then suddenly slapped his thigh and jerked upright. "By Jove, yes!" he cried. "Those Indians with the gold moons,—what did you call them?"

"You've guessed it," chuckled Thornton. "The Aurimeonas,—one and the same tribe. The nearest that Raleigh could come to the gutteral Indian sounds was 'Wariemetona.' Not a doubt of it in my mind. I've located the tribe who told Raleigh the story of Manoa."

"Then why the deuce didn't you ask them about it?" demanded Belmont.

"Because I'm wise enough not to," replied Thornton. "As soon as a white man begins asking an Indian about gold, the aborigine shuts up like a clam. Besides, I didn't need to, there were the gold moons,—and there was this."

As he ceased speaking, he drew a package from his pocket and tossed it into his friend's lap.

"Ouch!" ejaculated the engineer. "Go easy! What in thunder's in that, it's as heavy as lead." Then, as he

pulled open the wrappings, his eyes widened and he stared incredulously at the contents. "Well, I'll be damned!" he cried. Gleaming dully in his hand was a huge, polished, egg-shaped mass of virgin gold, pierced near one end and threaded with a fibre cord on which were strung a score of smaller nuggets, the whole weighing over ten pounds.

"Yes, I'll be damned!" he reiterated, utterly unable to find other words to express his feelings.

"Just what I said when I saw one of those Indians wearing that gew-gaw," grinned Thornton.

"Ned," said Belmont after a long pause during which his eyes never strayed from the marvellous barbaric necklace. "I may be as big a fool as there is, but no mining man with an atom of gambling spirit in his make-up could see those nuggets and not bite. Nuggets like these don't grow on every bush, and they don't grow alone. El Dorado may be all bunk, but there's nothing mythical about these beauties. I'm with you, old man. When do you start?"

Far up the Essequibo, a spoon-bottomed river boat was being urged against the swift current by four naked Indians. Perched on the prow was the Arekuna bowman, grasping his big paddle and swinging the boat to right or left between jagged huge black rocks. In the stern stood the half-Indian, half-negro captain with his huge steering paddle in its bight of rope, and beneath an arched palm-thatched shelter sat Thornton and Belmont.

New York and civilization seemed very distant. For five weeks Belmont and Thornton had been traveling up the river through unbroken jungle, forcing a way through rapids and cataracts, camping beneath the giant trees at night, and now they were nearing King William's Falls and their boat journey was almost at an end.

Presently, from far ahead, came a low roar, and, rounding a bend, a vast, flashing cataract came into view, barring the river from shore to shore.

"Can't go any further," announced Thornton, "and I for one won't be sorry to stretch my legs ashore. Beyond this place," he explained to Belmont, "the river's one cataract after another. And it's not a long walk to the first Taruma village. This is the route I followed on my last trip."

Rapidly the boat was unloaded and camp was made. The craft was secured in a sheltered cove, and the rest of the afternoon the men busied themselves dividing the cargo into packages which could be carried on their backs. Only the more important and essential things were to be taken, the rest being left until Indian carriers could be sent from the Taruma village.

Early the following morning, camp was broken, the men shouldered their loads in "surianas" or pack baskets, and the party plunged into the forest, following a faint trail. The country was rough and broken, great rocks were piled everywhere and going was difficult. But by noon the worst was over, the trail led across rolling hills through open forest, and late in the afternoon, they reached the edge of the jungle and looked out across a far reaching savanna broken by thickets and clumps of trees, fantastic rock masses and marshy swales, and with a large Indian village in plain sight. Just before sundown they came to a large cleared space in the centre of which was the mud-walled thatched houses of the Tarumas.

Wild and savage as the Indians appeared, naked but for loin-cloths, painted and tattooed, with long black hair falling over their shoulders, yet the Tarumas were

friendly and welcomed the white men cordially. Food was brought to them, they were given a vacant hut, and the welcoming calabash of "paiwarrie" was passed around.

"Isn't this the stuff they make by spitting chewed cassava into a trough?" asked Belmont, as he looked disgustedly at the yellowish-gray mess proffered him.

"Right you are," replied Thornton, "but it's not bad." As he spoke, he lifted the calabash to his lips and took a long draught of the liquor.

"I'll be hanged if I touch it!" exclaimed the other, as he started to dash the contents of the calabash on the ground.

Thornton caught his wrist. "You'll be worse than hanged if you don't," he declared in sharp, incisive tones. "It's a deadly insult to refuse. We'll never get beyond this place if you don't drink this paiwarrie. For Heaven's sake, man, don't be so confoundedly squeamish. Take only a sip if you can't stomach any more."

Belmont frowned, made a wry face, and with a muttered curse took a swallow of the ceremonial liquor. "Don't taste as rotten as I expected," he admitted with a grin, as he returned the calabash to the waiting girl.

Then followed the long established custom of the bush; Thornton presenting the chief and the others with gifts of tobacco, beads and cloth, and thus having established good fellowship, he stated his business and requested guides and carriers, speaking with the aid of Joseph, the Arekuna bowman, as interpreter.

Having already visited the Tarumas on his previous trip, Thornton was regarded as something of an old friend, and he had no difficulty in securing women to go back to the boat and bring up the supplies left there. But it was by no means as easy to secure guides and carriers to go into the interior. The old chief was quite willing to supply young men as guides and women as porters, as far as the nearest Pianoghotto village, but beyond that, he declared, no Taruma would venture. But as this was fully as much as Thornton had expected, he was quite satisfied.

At dawn the women, accompanied by the boat-captain, trudged off on the trail leading to the river, and late in the afternoon, they returned, each with her load of one hundred pounds, and carrying it as though it were a mere trifle.

"Some flappers," commented Belmont, as the women came trotting into the village, laughing and joking. "Lucky thing the girls back home haven't adopted Taruma costumes yet. Good Lord, think of seeing Broadway or Fifth Avenue with the girlies decked out in bead aprons and necklaces only! And how in thunder they manage those loads, beats me. Why, they're no bigger than ten year old kids, and what they're toting would stump a burro."

Thornton laughed. "All in getting accustomed to it," he replied. "Same as seeing the ladies going about like Mother Eve."

Daybreak two days later saw the expedition depart. Leaving the four Indian paddlers behind to look after the boat and such of the outfit as would not be needed on the overland journey, the two white men, with the boat-captain, Walters, Joseph the Arekuna interpreter, and a dozen women carriers, filed off along the trail, following two husky Taruma bucks who served as guides.

The march across the savanna was long and dreary. Pollen was dislodged from flowers and coarse, high grass,

filled eyes, nostrils and throats. The sun beat down relentlessly from a cloudless sky, and Belmont longed for the cool shade and moist air of the jungles long before noon of the first day.

The noonday halt, however, was scarcely a relief, for the scanty shadow of the low thorny palmettos was like a furnace, the water in the canteens was lukewarm, and Belmont was too thirsty and tired to relish food. He had crossed the western deserts, had climbed mountains, had tramped for days through dense woods and across frozen tundra, but never before had he felt so thoroughly exhausted. Thornton, however, seemed tireless and as fresh as ever. He swung along, keeping pace with the Tarumas, now and then humming a tune or whistling gaily, and Belmont, gritting his teeth, endured and suffered but gave no outward indication of his feelings. At last the sun swung towards the western horizon, camp was made in a sheltered swale, and the Indians quickly built tiny huts of Etah palm and canes.

"Now what in blazes do they need those for?" asked Belmont throwing himself into his hammock. "Gad, it's hotter than the hinges of Hades in the open,—let alone those kennels, and not a sign of rain."

Thornton laughed. "You'll be glad enough to crawl into one of them before long," he declared.

"Not on your life," insisted the engineer, wiping his reeking face. "Me for right here in the open air."

But half an hour later, he changed his mind. As darkness came upon the savanna, a cold wind came sweeping across the plains, a wind that chilled the white men to the bone and sent the Indians, shivering, to huddle about their fires.

"You're right," admitted Belmont, as he rummaged in his pack for coat and blanket. "Me for my kennel."

The second day was a repetition of the first, although Belmont did not feel it so badly, but on the third the savanna became greener, pools and ponds were frequent, and were swarming with teal, ducks, curlew and other wild fowl, and forgetting all else, Belmont spent the noon hour by decimating the teeming game. Then, by mid-afternoon, the party reached open spaces, where the grass had been burned away and where vegetables and cassava were growing.

"Not far to the village now," announced Thornton. "These are the Pianoghotto's gardens."

An hour later, the conical-roofed houses of the village were in sight, showing clearly against a dark background of heavy forest a mile beyond them.

"This is as far as I went, last trip," remarked the explorer, as they approached the village.

"And here's where you got those moons and that Golconda necklace, I suppose," said Belmont.

"Right you are," replied Thornton. "I wish those Aurimeona boys were here now."

Their arrival was announced by the yelping of innumerable half-starved curs, and the Pianoghotto men turned out in full force to see who was visiting them. Thornton was instantly recognized by the villagers, the guides and carriers were well known friends, and the party was welcomed as hospitably as by the Tarumas. This time Belmont did not hesitate to partake liberally of the paiwarrie, which despite its uninviting appearance, he found most refreshing.

In the morning, when the explorer endeavored to secure carriers to continue on his journey, he found as he expected that the Pianoghotto were very loth to accompany the party. The country beyond, they declared,

waving their arms indefinitely towards the forest, was the abiding place of devils and evil beings, and they also appeared to have an inherent fear of the Aurimeonas.

For a space it seemed as if the expedition was to prove a dismal failure almost at the start. As he was arguing, coaxing, trying by every means to persuade the Indians to go along, a party of three hunters arrived, carrying a couple of small deer. After listening for a few moments, one of the three stepped forward and offered his services as a guide. He was, it appeared half Aurimeona and while, like the others, he spoke with superstitious dread and evident fear of the forest devils, yet he was in no fear of crossing the savanna to his mother's village. Once he had secured one man, Thornton made progress. Beads, cloth and knives were liberally bestowed, and three Pianoghottos agreed to join his party. But nothing would induce others to go, nor could he persuade the Tarumas to travel farther into the unknown territory.

"It's the best we can do," declared the explorer. "We'll have to cut down on the outfit. We can only take the most essential things and leave the rest here. If we need the stuff later we can send carriers back for it. These Indians are absolutely honest so that nothing will be disturbed."

Accordingly, the loads were divided, everything not absolutely necessary was left with the Pianoghottos, and with the four men, Joseph and Walters each carrying a load as heavy as they could manage, and with the two white men also laden with heavy packs, the little party of eight men started into the unknown.

For four days they tramped across unending savannas, but as the grass was fresh and the soil moist there was no particular hardship. This the explorers knew was unmapped territory. No white man had ever before seen it, and as they traveled towards the distant forest, Thornton took copious notes and bearings, made rough sketches and constantly paused to examine vegetation, soil and rock outcrops. Once, during the noonday rest, as he was cracking bits of reddish stone he had collected, the half Aurimeona guide watched him with evident interest. Then, turning to Joseph, he spoke a few words in an Indian dialect.

"He tellum plenty rockstone like so, topline Aurimeona way," the Arekuna translated. "Him say rockstone all same *caracuri*."

"Listen to that, Frank," cried Thornton, "I'd like to know exactly what he meant by '*caracuri*'. That's their word for gold, but it also means red or yellow. It was that double meaning that fooled Raleigh so often. But these *are* auriferous rocks, and perhaps this fellow means gold."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Belmont, instantly attentive. "You're right, these rocks are mineralized. Just cross-question the boy, Ned. I guess we're on the right track."

Addressing Joseph, the explorer spoke to him in the strange "talky-talky" used by all the semi-civilized Guiana tribes. "What side he catchum rockstone like so?" he asked. "How long time makeum walk that side?"

Joseph spoke rapidly to the other and the latter replied at length. "He say Aurimeona feller, Peaiman (medicine-man) catchum same kind," he translated. "Peaiman feller make walk in bush, him no 'fraid devil. Him good friend devil. Him makeum fire all some rockstone one kind. Makeum ring, makeum beads all some *caracuri*. Aurimeona feller no sabby where findum."

Thornton whistled. "There you are!" he exclaimed. "He *does* mean gold. No doubt about it. He says they make beads and rings of the metal, and as we know, they have the moons and gold beads. But I'm stumped by what he says about their medicine-man making fire with stone. It must be the old fellow's got hold of some iron pyrite and strikes fire with it. Darned funny if he has, though. As far as known, no Indian tribe ever discovered the trick. He's a foxy old beggar I'll bet, and no doubt his people have a holy respect for him. No wonder they think he's a friend of the devils."

"It'll help us more if he's a good friend to us," declared the engineer. "And you were wrong about one thing, Ned. These Indians don't seem to mind talking about gold."

"That's because they've never dealt with white men before," explained the other. "They don't know us yet."

A little later that day the party came to a fair sized stream, and instantly Thornton uttered an exclamation of surprise. "See anything peculiar about this creek?" he asked.

Belmont studied the stream intently. "No," he replied presently. "That is, unless that it's clear and not brown like the rivers. What do you see that's strange?"

"It flows east," declared the explorer. "That proves we've crossed the divide that separates the Essequibo from the New River valley,—unless this creek swings to the west again."

"I don't see anything very remarkable about crossing the divide," said Belmont. "We'd never have known it, if you hadn't spotted this brook."

"Nothing remarkable, I admit," agreed Thornton. "But we're the first white men who have ever done so, and——" here he paused and swept his arm towards the little stream in mock ceremony, "Behold! You are now gazing upon a new river; are about to cross it in fact. Permit me to christen it in honor of a good sport even if he is lacking in a sense of romance. My friend, gaze upon Belmont River."

The engineer burst into hearty laughter. "Thanks awfully!" he cried, catching the other's bantering spirit. "I'm tremendously honored. Not much of a river, perhaps, but I can imagine that eventually it becomes a raging torrent and well worthy of the distinguished name you have bestowed upon it. Sir, I thank you!"

With a flourish, Belmont bowed low to the explorer. The next instant he and Thornton were fairly roaring with merriment, as they saw the rapt, puzzled expressions on the faces of the Indians, who, apparently, thought the two white men were going through some mystical religious ceremony.

Soon after crossing the stream, the guide broke into a dog trot, declaring that the Aurimeona village was just ahead. Elated, the others hurried after him, and within the hour, the cluster of huts was reached. Instantly, at sight of the strangers, the women and children scurried out of sight, and even the men drew back as if half-afraid and wholly suspicious of the new comers. But the next moment, the two who had traded their ornaments to Thornton, recognized him, and stepping forward, greeted the explorer. At a few words from these two the others gained confidence and welcomed the travelers, though still gazing at the white men as though they were amazing beings from another world. Suddenly Thornton grasped his companion's arm. "Look there!" he exclaimed. "Now will you believe?"

"Jove! He's a regular walking gold mine!" cried Belmont, as he stared at the Indian whom the explorer had pointed out, and who was fairly loaded down with golden arm and leg bands, necklets of nuggets, and a gold fillet about his thick black hair.

"And every mother's son of them is wearing gold moons!" continued Thornton. "It makes me feel as if——"

His sentence was interrupted by the appearance of a strange figure pushing through the little circle of Indians. He was old and wrinkled, with an enormous head and fat paunch, and his face and body were decorated with a maze of geometrical designs in red, black, yellow and white. On his head he wore a magnificent halo-like feather crown, and to the fringe and strings dangling from it, were attached a score of the gorgeous orange skins of the Cock-of-the-Rock. About his neck and shoulders were string after string of jaguar and peccary teeth, rattling seeds and iridescent beetle wings. About his neck was a collar of parrot feathers, and through the septum of his nose was a bone spindle with the ends decorated with long, bright colored feathers and tufts of scarlet toucan down, while from his lower lip dangled a six inch tassel of red and yellow plumes. In one hand he carried a stout carved staff ornamented with gay feathers, tufts of fur and festoons of seeds, and in the other hand he held a huge calabash rattle.

Even Belmont recognized him as the medicine-man or Peaiman, and both Americans gazed at him fascinated, for a full dozen of the gold crescents were suspended from his nose, lips and ears, while about his wrists and ankles were strings of immense nuggets.

"Talk about El Dorado!" cried Belmont. "That old boy comes as near it as I ever expect to see."

"He's the fellow our guide told about," declared Thornton. "And as crafty as they're made, or I'm no judge of Indians."

With weird glances and contortions, the Peaiman approached the white men, banging his staff on the ground, shaking his rattle, and jabbering away in his own lingo. Turning to Joseph, Thornton directed him to tell the old fellow that they were friends, that they had brought presents for the Peaiman and his people, and that they wished to explore the forest. This of course, the Arekuna was obliged to translate to one of the Pianoghottos, and before he could do so the old medicine-man burst into cackling laughter. Then, to the utter amazement of Thornton and Belmont, he began speaking in talky-talky. "Me tellum plenty good feller," he exclaimed. "Me like-um. Me tellum what him wantum can do. Me tellum Peaiman all same good friend."

As he spoke he extended a claw-like hand, and speechless with surprise to find that this man, whom they had supposed had never seen a white man, understood and used the garbled English dialect, Thornton and Belmont gravely shook hands with him.

At last the explorer recovered sufficiently from his surprise to find his voice. "We good friend, all same Aurimeona," he assured the medicine-man. "Peaiman plenty good feller, Bimeby me say what me wantum. How come Peaiman sabby talky-talky?"

Instantly the Indian's expression changed, and a cunning leer swept over his features. "Peaiman sabby all things," he replied. "S'pose wantum rain, me tellum, he come. S'pose wantum fire, me catchum."

"He's a wily old rascal all right," chuckled the

powers, and claims to be a rain maker. Some nerve!"

The medicine-man meanwhile was fumbling in a leather pouch at his belt, and presently he drew out a bit of rock and a lump of dull gray metal.

"Guess he's going to give a demonstration of his fire-making," said the explorer.

Placing a bit of tinder on the rock, the Peaiman struck the pebble with the metal. A shower of sparks flew off and the tinder glowed and smoked.

A sigh-like murmur of wonder and adoration rose from the assembled Indians at this proof of their Peaiman's supernatural powers, and the old fellow looked triumphantly at the white men as if to say, "Beat that if you can."

"I'll be damned!" ejaculated Belmont. "You were right about his knowing the use of flint and steel, Ned."

"I'll bet he never discovered it," declared the other. "That old fakir has lived among white men. But do you see what he's using for steel? It's a bit of a meteorite!" Then, as he took a box of matches from his pocket, Thornton remarked: "Now watch me give him a jolt." As he spoke, he struck a match and held it up for all to see.

He had expected a look of wonder, if not of abject terror, on the Indians' faces. Instead, they showed no signs of either interest nor surprise. To all outward appearances they might have used safety matches all their lives, and the old medicine-man cackled derisively.

"Aurimeona gottum plenty same kind!" he exclaimed, and from his pouch he produced a box of matches!

"Well, I'll be shot!" ejaculated Thornton. "They have been in contact with civilization."

"But still think flint and steel magical," added Belmont. "Gad, but they are a topsy-turvy lot."

"Wonder what they'll think of this," remarked the explorer, as he took a magnifying-glass from his pocket and held it up for the Indians to see. Then, stooping, he focused it on a wisp of dry grass. Intently the Peaiman and his fellows watched, and as the dry material smoked and burst into flame, a half-frightened wail of surprise and wonder rose from their throats.

"I rather guess that fire eclipses the one of his magic stone," laughed the explorer, as he pocketed the lens. "I'll wager that the old fellow would tell all he knows in exchange for that glass."

It was obvious that the medicine-man was envious. It would never do to have visitors who could perform magic he could not equal, and he fairly fawned upon the white men, muttering flattering and complimentary things, jabbering in a mixture of Aurimeona and talky-talky, but never for an instant taking his beady eyes from the pocket that held the magic glass. At last, leading the two men to a new hut, he informed them it was theirs. Food and paiwarrie passed around, and as the Indians gathered about, Thornton distributed presents.

At once it became evident that even if the Peaiman had been in contact with civilization, his people had not. The Indians were absolutely at a loss as to the use or purpose of many of Thornton's gifts, and the cloth, beads, pins and knives brought forth squeals of amazement and delight.

"If they have never met white men, how the deuce does it happen that they have iron and other things?" asked Belmont. "Their arrows have iron tips, the men have knives and machetes, and there's a cracked porce-

"Probably traded such things through other tribes," replied Thornton, "or maybe the Peaiman brought them in. On one trip I found a village where the people still used stone implements and yet had breach-loading shot-guns."

The distribution of the presents having been completed, the explorer began quizzing the medicine-man regarding the forest and the possibility of securing guides to go into it. The old fellow, however, insisted that to enter the jungle beyond a short distance was impossible. Through it, he declared, there ran a large river, and beyond the stream no man could go, as it was the home of devils and evil spirits. If the white men wished to go to the river's bank his men would guide them; but beyond that, no. Then he naively asked why they desired to enter the forest, and what they sought.

"Same old bunk about the devil-devils," exclaimed Belmont. "Tell him we're looking for his——"

"Hold on, let me handle this, Frank," interrupted the other. Then, turning again to the Peaiman, Thornton assured him that they merely wanted to explore the forest and map the river, and he asked the fellow about the size and flow of the stream. All of this was, to the impatient engineer, a waste of time and of no consequence.

The Indian, however, either could not or would not give the desired information. The river was swift, he said. It was not "too wide," and it might be crossed if it were not for the devils beyond. Also, he declared, it flowed through a "hole in the ground," according to tradition, although he did not know about this personally.

"He's still suspicious," declared Belmont, "and he knows a lot more about that district than he admits. I'll bet his placer is beyond that river. Why don't you ask him flat? What's the use of beating about the bush?"

"Yes, I think he knows all right," agreed Thornton. "Now I'm going to spring a surprise on him."

Turning to the medicine-man he abruptly demanded to know how, if the woods were full of devils, the Peaiman could go there safely.

A guilty look of surprise swept across the fellow's wrinkled features, he fidgeted, and at last evaded a direct answer by asking why the white man thought he had ever been there. Thornton leaned forward and touched the nuggets about the Peaiman's ankles, pointed to the pouch containing the stone and meteorite, and gazed fixedly into the Indian's eyes. "Me tellum Peaiman catchum *caracuri* that place," he declared. "Me-sabby Peaiman gettum fire rockstone topside river."

The medicine-man drew back, glanced furtively about, and then, as if realizing that he could not hoodwink the white men, he vowed that he was friendly with the devils, that he possessed charms which rendered them powerless to harm him, and then, to cap the climax, he offered to guide the two to the spot where he secured the gold in exchange for the magic moon that made fire.

"Bully for old Billikins!" cried the engineer. "He's no fool. That lens is a better bet for him than all the gold and iron."

"I think I begin to see daylight," mused Thornton. "He keeps up that devil business to prevent his people from following him into the bush; plays on their superstitions for his own ends. And now that the magic of the first and best performance is beginning to be an

order to get some new magic. I expect the river he talks about is the Belmont River."

"Hang the river!" laughed the other. "Let's get after the gold. Ask the old rascal if we can start tomorrow."

But the Peaiman shook his head at this suggestion. He would hear nothing of such a plan, and insisted that there must be time for preparations; that the Indians must have a feast and must celebrate the visit of the white men and the riches they had acquired, and that, to start off without first propitiating the evil spirits, would result in disaster.

It was hopeless to argue or to coax. The medicine man was obdurate, and despite Belmont's impatience, Thornton convinced him that the only course to follow was to fall in with the Peaiman's plans.

"He may back out altogether if we don't," he declared. "Although he plays on the Indians' superstitions for his own benefit, he's as superstitious as any of them himself, and we've got to humor him."

At nightfall the celebration began. The Indians, dressed in all their ceremonial finery of feather crowns, mantles of plumes, rattles and dance-sticks, and with bodies and faces hideously painted, pranced and cavorted to the fitful glare of the bonfires and the throbbing booming of drums. Savage as they appeared, yet the Aurimeonas were good natured, happy and full of fun, and presently they insisted that the white men must join in the revels.

Thornton, long familiar with Indian ways, at once assented, donned a feather headdress, seized a dance-stick, and was soon shouting and prancing with the best of them. But Belmont held off. He felt self-conscious, thought the whole affair tom-foolery, and vowed he'd be hanged if he'd make an ass of himself.

"Forget it!" shouted the explorer, as he paused in the dance. "It'll please the Indians. We want to make ourselves as solid as possible with them. Just forget you're a staid and dignified New Yorker and turn savage for a while. It's not one half as ridiculous as the rot and nonsense you put on at your lodge initiations."

Reluctantly the engineer agreed. But he soon entered into the spirit of the fun, until presently everyone,—the half-breed boat captain, Joseph, the two white men and the Pianohottos were prancing and yelling, while the old Peaiman never seemed to tire, but was the liveliest of his tribe.

It was strenuous work, however, and before long Belmont dropped out of the circle: Thornton followed, and slipping away unnoticed to their hut, they tumbled into their hammocks.

Suddenly Belmont commenced to laugh.

"What's the joke?" asked the explorer.

"I was just wondering," replied the engineer, "what my office force would think if they should see me cavorting about with those savages."

"The answer's easy," chuckled Thornton. "They'd think you were crazy."

"Confound the rascals!" exclaimed Thornton, as he stepped from the hut the following morning. "I was afraid this would happen."

Belmont sprang from his hammock and hurried outside. "What's up now?" he cried. "Anything wrong?"

The explorer pointed to a group of women about a huge wooden trough. All were busily masticating and expectorating into the receptacle.

"Making that filthy medicine," muttered the

we object? Come on, let's rout up Billikins and start off."

"If we get him started in a week from now, we'll be lucky," declared the other. "They're getting ready for a paiwarrie spree—a good big drunk, and such things often last a week or ten days."

"The devil, you say!" exclaimed Belmont. "Let's get busy and see if we can't argue some sense into their heads. Tell the Peaiman you'll go back on your bargain."

They found the medicine-man dozing in the doorway of his hut, and to all of Thornton's pleas he merely shook his head, insisting that it would be an affront to the spirits and an insult to his guests if the spree were abandoned. Arguments, threats, promises, were all useless. A paiwarrie feast was a part of the programme, and nothing could change the Indians' plans.

At last Thornton gave up in despair. "It's no use," he announced. "We've got to make the best of it. After all, a few days make little difference. If a fight doesn't start between the Aurimeonas and our Pianoghottos it won't be so bad. I think I'll send our guides and carriers back and run no risk of trouble."

The Pianoghottos refused flatly to leave, however. They had no intention of missing the spree, and finding there was nothing he could do in the matter, the explorer seated himself in the shadow of the hut, lit his pipe and morosely watched the preparations of the Indians.

The trough of chewed cassava had now been filled with water and left to ferment until it acquired the desired kick, and the Indians loafed about, lazing and sleeping, and abandoning all occupations as they waited for the day to pass and the spree to begin. Naturally, the two white men were virtual prisoners until the orgy was over, for without guides or carriers they could go nowhere. But there was nothing to prevent them from wandering wherever they desired, and Thornton suggested that they should do a little exploring by themselves. This suited the engineer, and together they started off. Before they had gone a dozen yards, Joseph joined them, declaring that he would take no part in the spree, and explaining that his chief had forbidden the use of paiwarrie by any member of his village, owing to the fact that his people had been nearly exterminated by an orgy in the past.

"Prohibition chap, eh," laughed Belmont. "Well, I'm glad we can count on one sober man. I never thought I'd be a dry advocate, but I am here. But how in blazes could paiwarrie wipe out the Indians?"

"Kenaima," replied Thornton. "If an Indian gets drunk and a fight starts and a man is killed, Indian law demands that the murderer and every member of his family must be destroyed. Moreover, this vengeance must be carried out by the Kenaima, a man who, by certain rites, is believed to be possessed with the Kenaima or blood-avenger spirit. He may be either a tiger Kenaima or a 'camudi' (snake) Kenaima, but in either case he must track down and destroy his victim in certain prescribed ways; by striking with a club if a tiger-Kenaima or by strangulation if a camudi-Kenaima. Also, during the time he is on the man-hunt, he must not see or speak to a living being, for according to Indian belief, if he does so he must kill the unfortunate person he meets. When he at last succeeds in his purpose he must thrust a stick through the body of his victim and lick the blood from it in order to restore

himself to the status of an ordinary human being. Otherwise, he believes he will forever be in possession of the Kenaima spirit and will run amuck, killing all he meets."

"Nice, cheerful sort of beggar," commented Belmont. "But I don't see yet how the evening of scores in that way would kill off a whole tribe. And what's to prevent the chasee turning the tables and killing the chaser?"

"Nothing to prevent that, except the superstitions of the Indians, their firm belief in the supernatural character of the Kenaima, and the fact that if one avenger is destroyed another immediately takes up the chase," replied Thornton. "It's hopeless for an Indian murderer to evade death by a Kenaima. They've been known to trail a victim to Georgetown and kill him in the streets. The reason a village or tribe may be wiped out by a Kenaima is that the relatives of the Kenaima's victim naturally start their Kenaima after the other, and thus a feud is started which may last until every member of a community is destroyed. That's why I was anxious to be rid of our Pianoghottos. If they start fighting with the Aurimeonas when drunk, someone may be killed and a Kenaima started. Then the Lord alone knows where it will end."

"Not any chance of our getting into it, is there?" asked Belmont.

"Hardly," the other assured him. "I've never heard of a white man being trailed or killed by a Kenaima, and even the Indians could scarcely consider us the relatives of the Pianoghottos or responsible for them. However, I don't really expect there'll be serious trouble. What I fear is that the Indians will be so exhausted and ill after their spree that we'll be delayed for days or even weeks."

As they were talking, the three men had crossed the strip of savanna and had reached the edge of the forest. The moment they entered it they realized how hopeless it would be to attempt a long trip without guides. It was far more dense than any jungle they had hitherto seen; there were no visible trails or paths, and it was next to impossible to proceed in any direction without cutting a way. Nothing could be accomplished here, and retracing their steps, they wandered over the savanna towards the stream which Thornton had facetiously named in honor of his comrade. Reaching this, they followed along its banks and discovered that where it entered the forest it afforded an easy means penetrating the jungle, for the water was low and a fairly wide strip of sand and stones was exposed between the water and the tangle on the banks.

"It would be possible to follow this stream far into the forest," declared the explorer. "It is in all probability the river the Peaiman mentioned and which forms the boundary to the 'devils' country. But it must flow in a very circuitous route to be five days' journey from the village back there."

"Why not follow it and find out?" suggested the engineer. "We could pack quite an outfit ourselves, and Joseph could carry a load also. Walters would go with us, too, and we might strike old Billikin's mine without his help."

Thornton shook his head. "We three couldn't carry enough to last us three days, to say nothing of five," he declared. "And as far as Walters is concerned, he'll be drunker than any Indian tonight. Those half-breeds are worse than the pure bloods."

They soon found, however, that even had they been able to carry enough supplies for the journey, traveling by the bed of the stream would not be easy nor feasible. A perpendicular wall of rock barred the way, and the creek, flowing against its base, swung abruptly to the south. On the opposite shore the rocks were broken and rough, however, and it would have been possible to have proceeded farther by crossing the stream higher up. But as it was growing late, and as there was nothing to be gained by going on, the three returned to the savanna and the village.

"I'm satisfied of one thing," remarked Belmont, who had carefully examined the bed of the stream and the rock formations. "The Peaiman does not get his gold out of that river. There's some 'color' there, but I'll stake my reputation as a mining engineer that it doesn't carry any good values or large nuggets."

"I agree with you there," said Thornton. "But I still believe the medicine-man does know the location of the fabulously rich placers which his ancestors described to Raleigh."

"For my part I'm getting disgusted with the whole business," declared the engineer. "I haven't the least faith in that El Dorado or Manoa yarn. Perhaps the Peaiman found a placer or pocket, but he's probably cleaned up all the nuggets long ago. And for all we know the gold may have been in the tribe for centuries. I'm beginning to realize what a consummate ass I was to have started on such a wild-goose chase."

Thornton laughed. "You needn't kick yourself," he said. "You've got the golden eggs the wild goose laid, at any rate. There's enough in the Aurimeona village to pay for the expedition and a mighty good profit besides. If we don't get anything else we'll trade in all the gold the Indians own."

"A few thousand, perhaps," the other grudgingly agreed. "But no fortune."

By now the sounds of shouting and yelling were audible from the village.

"They've commenced already," announced the explorer. "We'd better make ourselves as inconspicuous as possible. And remember to keep your eyes on Walters and our Pianoghottos. If trouble starts we can grab them and tie them in our hut." Then, turning to Joseph, he cautioned the Arekuna, exacted a promise not to touch the liquor, and warned him not to get into any argument with the other Indians or to take offense at anything they might do or say.

As yet, however, none of the tribesmen had taken enough paiwarrie to cause them to lose control of their senses, while the Pianoghottos and the half-breed, Walters, were standing aloof in a group by themselves.

"I hope they continue to keep together and not mix with the rest," said Thornton. "Then we can watch them more easily and corral them if they do get into trouble. Hello! Where's that half-Aurimeona fellow?"

The man, however, was nowhere in sight, and Thornton ordered Joseph to hunt him and watch him during the spree, and to bring word if he showed any signs of getting quarrelsome.

As the sun set and darkness came on, fires blazed, and hourly the Indians became more boisterous. Soon many of them were unable to walk steadily, or even to keep their feet, and threw themselves in their hammocks or upon the ground where they continued to drink. Others, still steady on their legs, began shouting boastful accounts of their bravery and prowess,

and to swagger about, taunting the others and hurling insults. Little heed was given them, however, although once or twice there were half-hearted scuffles between two Indians.

Thornton and Belmont noticed also, that none of the Aurimeonas carried weapons, and were duly thankful. Even the women and children were drinking freely, and soon the entire village was involved in a debasing, disgusting orgy.

The two white men kept in the shadows, trying to follow the movements of the boat-captain and the Pianoghottos, while Joseph slipped silently here and there, watching the half-blood Aurimeona with keen eyes. Several times the women called to the Arekuna and pressed him to drink. Each time Joseph craftily accepted, and pretending to drink the liquor, cast it on the ground as soon as the women turned away.

"He's all right," declared Belmont. "On the water-wagon in earnest. And I don't think there'll be any trouble after all. They all seem to be quieting down."

"Getting too drunk even to talk," commented Thornton. "Most of them lying like pigs in their sties, and so many of the women are drunk that not much paiwarrie is being passed around."

"By Jove, I have a scheme!" ejaculated the engineer. "What's to stop us from dumping the rest of the booze from the trough? The rascals are too drunk to notice anything. We can sneak up and empty the stuff and they'll think they've used it themselves."

"Good idea," agreed Thornton. "But if you or I tried it we'd be caught instantly. We'll let Joseph try it. He can go to the trough with a calabash as if to help himself, and when no one is looking—Good Lord! Hell's broken loose now!"

From a knot of Indians near one of the fires, there was a chorus of shouts and a piercing scream. Instantly the group was transformed into a struggling fighting mass, and a single glance told the Americans that the Pianoghottos were in trouble.

Instantly the two men dashed forward, but before they could reach the scene of the fight, Joseph rushed to them. "Me tellum plenty bad!" he panted, wild eyed and excited. "Pianoghotto feller killum Aurimeona man. Aurimeona make for killum all Pianoghotto!"

There was no time to ask details. The white men's worst fears were realized, and murder had been done. The all important matter now was to prevent further bloodshed, and to separate the combatants before all the Pianoghottos were slain.

Forcing their way through the struggling, drunken savages, Thornton and Belmont reached the centre of disturbance. Lying on the earth was the dead Aurimeona, his head split open by a machete, and above the body stood the three Pianoghottos, the boat-captain and the half-blood Aurimeona, the latter with blood pouring from a deep cut on his shoulder. It was indeed fortunate that the Aurimeonas had not been armed, and though bent on destroying the other tribesmen, they were so befuddled that they were stupid and slow to act.

On the other hand, the Pianoghottos appeared fairly sober, and were trying to back away, while Walters guarded their retreat with a blood-stained machete in his hand, and in drunken fury was keeping the Aurimeonas at bay.

Shouting to the captain not to strike, Thornton leaped forward followed by Belmont and Joseph. But the words were hardly uttered when the captain swung his

weapon on the nearest Indian and stretched him lifeless, beside his fallen tribesman.

For a brief instant the Aurimeonas drew back, and taking advantage of this, the explorer wrenched the machete from Walter's grasp, seized him by the scruff of the neck, and shouting to the others to follow, kicked and cuffed the Pianoghottos into motion, and hurried with the captain from the village. Belmont, following his comrade's example, seized the nearest Pianoghotto, and driving the half-blood Aurimeona before him, ran with Thornton into the darkness beyond the firelight. Joseph, meanwhile, had vanished, but a moment later, he came racing up carrying the engineer's gun and cartridge belt. He had realized the danger they were in without arms, and had risked his life to hurry back to the hut and secure the gun. Belmont fully appreciated the Arekuna's brave and thoughtful act, but there was no time to be lost in expressing gratitude, for even the engineer knew that all were in the deadliest peril.

The village was now in a turmoil. The Aurimeonas were mad for vengeance, and the only hope of safety lay in making the best possible speed across the savanna and trying to reach the distant Pianoghotto village before the Aurimeonas had recovered their senses and their legs sufficiently to follow.

It was a desperate measure. The savanna stretched vast, black and limitless as a waveless sea before them. To enter it at night without provisions or supplies was almost suicidal, but still greater danger lay behind in the village. Suddenly, from the village, came a wailing cry, a weird, blood-curdling shout; "Kenaima! Kenaima!" At the awful word the Pianoghottos cringed and trembled, Joseph uttered a low moan and shivered, and even matter-of-fact Belmont felt a curious tingling sensation on his scalp. All knew the dreadful import of that wailing cry, and without hesitation, the fugitives plunged into the mazes of the trackless savanna.

Onward through the night they hurried, and as they went the captain and the Pianoghottos wore off the effects of the liquor, and, bit by bit, related how the trouble had started. An Aurimeona had taunted the half-blood with being a renegade. Words had followed. The Pianoghottos had taken the part of their companion. An Aurimeona had struck and wounded him in the shoulder, and the injured man had wrenched the machete from his aggressor and had killed him. Then Walters had arrived; another Aurimeona had been sacrificed, and as a result the relentless Kenaima would follow on the Pianoghottos' trail until full vengeance was meted out.

"Looks like a fond farewell to old Billikins and our gold mine," remarked Belmont, as they stumbled on and the sounds from the village became faint and were lost.

"It will be farewell to us, too, if we don't have everlastingly good luck," said Thornton grimly.

"Then you honestly believe they'll send a Kenaima after us," said the engineer.

"Not a doubt of it," the other declared positively, "there are two deaths to be avenged and the laws of blood vengeance are sacred. I'll wager a Kenaima has already started on our trail."

Involuntarily Belmont glanced behind him and clutched his gun nervously. What Thornton had told him of the Kenaima came vividly to his mind; but the blackness was impenetrable. "Don't suppose he'll bother us, do you?" he asked as if to reassure himself. "They know we had no part in the killings."

"I wish to heaven I *could* think he wouldn't," burst out the explorer. "But I can't. According to Kenaima law, not only the murderers but all their families must be wiped out. Both Walters and this wounded man will be direct objects of vengeance, and as the Pianoghottos were involved, and as we helped all to escape, I'm convinced that we're all in the same boat from the Aurimeonas' point of view."

"Damned cheerful thought," growled Belmont.

"If we can reach the Essequibo and our boat, I think we'll be safe," continued Thornton. "I don't imagine the Kenaima will follow any but the actual culprits very far. But until then, death lurks in every thicket, at every turn. And there's another reason for my belief that we'll be included in the vengeance. The old Peaiman would hesitate at nothing to secure my burning glass. Not that he'd steal it, for these Indians are honest. But he knows he's lost his chances of getting it by showing us the gold, and if he can find an excuse for putting us out of the way by means of a Kenaima, he'll do it to get the magic moon, as he calls it. I shouldn't be the least surprised if the old fellow turns Kenaima himself."

"Well, he or any other damned Indian that tries any Kenaima business on me is going to get a charge of buckshot," declared the engineer. "They'll find that tackling a white man isn't like knocking a frightened Indian over the head."

"I hope it won't come to that," said Thornton. "It would only mean that we would be subjects for another avenger. But of course, if you see a Kenaima, you'll have to shoot to save these fellows' lives, or our own."

Several times, as they tramped hurriedly on in the darkness, the guide lost his way, and they wandered about aimlessly, seeking the trail. But with daylight there was less trouble, and at last they reached the little stream.

Their eyes were heavy for want of sleep. They were footsore and weary; the wounded Indian was so weak from loss of blood that he had to be half-carried by his comrades, and it was obvious that a halt must be made for a brief rest.

Carefully concealing their tracks, they turned at right angles, and pressing through the coarse grass and weeds, reached a little patch of trees in a hollow. They had no food, and although there were plenty of birds about, Belmont did not dare to shoot for fear of betraying their hiding place to possible pursuers. Joseph, however, managed to snare a trumpet-bird, and despite the danger, they made a small fire and cooked the creature. Sleep was out of the question, for all were far too nervous, too alive to their peril, to close their eyes. Weak as the wounded man was, he declared he would rather die on the way than starve in the thicket, and so, once more, they resumed their weary march.

A Pianoghotto led the way. Behind him was the wounded man supported by his fellow Indians. Behind these came Belmont, Thornton and Walters, while Joseph brought up the rear. All knew there was little fear of an attack as long as they were on the alert and moving, for the Kenaima, as Thornton had explained to Belmont, must strike his victim down by prescribed methods. Throughout the long, scorching, hot day they kept on. Their heads reeled with the sun, with lack of sleep, with hunger and thirst, and even the tireless Indians stumbled and showed signs of exhaustion. As the sun sank, Thornton insisted that they must camp for the night, for game trails crossed and recrossed the path, and

to attempt to proceed in the darkness would merely mean getting hopelessly lost. So once more they turned aside, hoping to find a sheltered spot where there was water, and to obtain a better view of their surroundings, they ascended a low hill.

Joseph was the first at the summit, and as he swept his eyes about the horizon he uttered a startled cry and pointed back towards the east. Stretching across the sea of waving grass was a wall of smoke, and beneath it great tongues of flame gleamed and leaped as they devoured the dry herbage. The savanna was on fire! The wind, blowing strongly from the east, was driving the raging flames directly towards the fugitives, and each moment the dense smoke and darting flames were rushing nearer and nearer.

For a brief moment the party upon the knoll stood spellbound, gazing at this new peril. Then Thornton found voice and shouted orders.

"Tear up the grass," he yelled. "Then set fire to that on the west. It's our only chance. We must make for the forest. The Aurimeonas are trying to burn us out."

Feverishly the men tore and cut the grass and weeds from the knoll, but before it was accomplished, darkness had descended, the roar of the oncoming fire was plainly audible, and the flames illuminated the savanna with a vivid glare, while choking smoke filled the lungs of the fugitives. Lighting the encircling fringe of vegetation, the explorer and his companions crowded back as far as possible from the heat of the fire. The wind had risen, the grass burned rapidly, and before the onrushing conflagration reached within half a mile of the knoll a broad stretch of charred and blackened earth safeguarded the men. It was an old plains trick, and it had served its purpose. There was no time to lose, and though the earth still glowed in spots, and here and there a bush or small tree blazed like a torch above the smoking ground, the party dashed from their refuge and hurried towards the forest. The Indian's bare feet suffered terribly from the heated ground, cinders and sparks fell thick about them, and all were choking and coughing with smoke. Long before they reached the cool protection of the forest the wounded Indian threw himself upon the earth, rested his head upon his knees and prepared to await his end. He could go no farther, and preferred death to the agony he was enduring.

"We can't go on and leave him here," declared Thornton. "We must manage to find some spot where there's damp earth or water and green foliage, and camp there for the rest of the night."

Joseph at once volunteered to search for a desirable location, and soon returned with the news that he had found a thicket and a small pond a short distance away. Raising the wounded Indian, and half-carrying him along the party stumbled after Joseph, and reached the little copse where the vegetation was untouched by fire. The water in the pool was black with ashes and charred leaves and was thick with mud, but to the smoke-parched throats and burning faces of the fugitives, it was marvelously welcome. A rough bed of leaves was made for the injured man, and the others, famished and weak, seated themselves dejectedly in the shelter of the stunted trees. They had had nothing to eat, with the exception of the skinny trumpet-bird, for twenty-four hours, they had tramped many miles, and had worked feverishly and beyond their strength to save themselves from the flames, but no word of complaint was uttered. If they could only manage to reach the jungle they might yet be safe,

for there game could be found, seeds and nuts might serve to keep them from starvation, and provided the Kenaima did not destroy them, they might yet win their way to the Pianoghotto village and safety.

Sleep, however, was imperative, and it was agreed that first one and then another should keep watch while the rest slept. As Joseph, although the youngest of the party, appeared to be the least exhausted, he was given the first watch. Belmont handed his loaded gun to the Arekuna, threw himself on the ground, and the next instant was sound asleep, for, like the others, he was utterly exhausted. He was dimly conscious of hearing Joseph arousing the boat captain when the Indian's watch was over and then, suddenly, he awoke to full consciousness and with an involuntary yell at the sound of a gunshot and a terrifying cry.

Leaping up, he found Thornton and Joseph also aroused, while the captain stood, trembling and wild-eyed, with the still smoking gun in hand.

"Wha-la!" he exclaimed before a question could be asked. "Kenaima come! Me see he kill de sick man. Like tiger he come. Me make to shoot he, but no can do, Wha-la! Kenaima debbil for true!"

The others turned. One glance was enough. The wounded Indian was dead, his skull crushed in by a terrific blow.

"The first victim!" cried Thornton. "But where the devil are the other men?"

Then, for the first time, all realized that the other Indians were missing. There was no sign of them, and the four men stared at one another with frightened, serious faces. Without the Pianoghotto guides they were hopelessly lost.

"They've deserted!" cried the explorer. "Their fear of the Kenaima and the forest was too much for them. But thank God the avenger chose the victim he did. The poor fellow only had his life shortened by a few hours, he could not have lived through another day."

"Damn those cowardly Indians!" burst out the engineer. "Tw'll serve them right if the Kenaima gets them."

"He will," declared the other. "No fear he won't. But he'll attend to us first, I'm afraid, we're handier."

"It's one hell of a feeling, this standing here like a flock of sheep waiting to be knocked over the head by that devil any minute," said Belmont.

"There's no danger for the present," Thornton assured him. "Dawn is breaking, and the Kenaima never attacks during daylight. Joseph, light a fire."

Shaking with terror, his bronze skin actually pale with fear, the Arekuna obeyed, and the cheerful blaze did much to restore courage to the four survivors.

"We must get into the bush at once," announced Thornton, as the sun rose. "Even the Kenaima is less to be dreaded than starvation, and there'll be no game on the savanna after the fire. By following the forest's edge towards the west, we may eventually reach the Pianoghotto village. It's going to be a tough job, but it's our only hope."

"Thank the Lord, or rather Joseph, that we've got a gun and plenty of cartridges," said Belmont. "We won't starve if there's game to be found."

"Even with plenty of food, we're in a devilish bad fix," Thornton reminded him. "The nearest village is fully seventy-five miles away, by the most direct route. We've no supplies, blankets, hammocks nor anything but the clothes on our backs; the few articles in our

pockets, your gun and ammunition. And there's a relentless, savage, fanatical murderer doing his level best to wipe us out. But we're not done yet. I've been through some pretty tight places before now, and came out all right. Now let's hustle for the forest."

By noon the trees, with their drapery of vines and dark shady depths, were reached, and the four, half-starved, utterly exhausted men pushed their way through the dense vegetation and left the sun-baked, fire-blackened savanna behind.

For a short distance the jungle was impenetrable, and Joseph hacked and hewed a path. But once well within the forest, it was more open, and the party proceeded quietly, eyes and ears alert for any living thing that might serve as food. Birds were high in the trees, but invisible and out of gunshot, and it was not until the men had penetrated fully a mile into the woods that the barking cries of toucans were heard. Creeping forward, Belmont brought down two of the grotesque birds. Joseph rushed forward to secure the welcome game, and as he picked them up, he uttered a glad cry. "Saouri!" he exclaimed, as he exhibited an irregular, rough-shelled, enormous nut.

The Saouri or Paradise nuts, much like Brazil nuts but three times as large, were a most welcome and lucky find. As the toucans sizzled over the fire the ravenous men stayed their first pangs of hunger by devouring all the nuts they could find. They were all too few, however, and even Joseph found it impossible to climb the enormous tree and shake down more. The toucans, too, were woefully small and skinny, the two tough, stringy creatures being scarcely more than mouthfuls for the four men. But even this slender meal of nuts and toucan put new life and strength into the party, and they hurried on, trusting to finding more abundant food ahead.

Following the easiest route between the trees, peering into every thicket and tangle, and craning necks to search the trees for sloths, monkeys, parrots or any other game, they gave little heed to their surroundings. At last they came to a low, damp spot bare of undergrowth, and an agouti scuttled across the opening. At the report of the engineer's gun, the creature tumbled head over heels, and a good dinner was assured. Sunset was near, the forest was becoming dusky and dim, and as the swampy spot was no place in which to camp, they turned and made their way towards higher ground. Presently they reached a low ridge with an immense mora tree upon the summit. The base of the tree spread out in enormous slab-like buttresses extending nearly twenty feet on every side of the trunk, and between these walls of living wood a fire was built and the men prepared to spend the night. In many ways it was an ideal spot for their purpose. The tree itself provided protection on three sides, and an enemy would be forced to approach by the narrow opening between the buttresses. To be sure, there was cover which could conceal the Kenaima or anyone else, until within a few feet of the camp, but it was all small growth, and while the agouti was roasting, everyone worked, clearing a large open space about the tree. Palm leaves were spread upon the earth for beds, and the dense foliage of the mora tree provided a roof which would keep out any ordinary rain. With appetites fully satisfied for the first time in three days, the men felt quite secure, and congratulated themselves upon the way fortune had favored them since entering the forest. All realized that they must be constantly on guard, for the gunshots had most certainly betrayed their where-

abouts, and arrangements were made to keep fires blazing brightly throughout the night in order to illuminate a wide area about the tree.

Thornton took the first watch, but the night passed without incident or alarm, and after breakfasting on the remains of the agouti, the party again set out. It was still very early; cries of parrots and the notes of birds filled the forest, and within ten minutes after leaving their camp, Belmont shot a pair of big green Amazons and a pheasant-like Marudi which rose with a whirl from underfoot. Joseph declared it had a nest near by, and a search soon revealed its four large, blue-green eggs. Still hungry, the men stopped by a stream and ate a meal of roasted parrot and eggs, saving the pheasant for their noonday lunch. With far lighter hearts than at any time since they had fled from the Aurimeona village, they trudged on for hour after hour. But no bright light among the trees marked the edge of the forest bordering the savanna, and at last Thornton halted. He glanced about, examined the trees and, turning to Joseph, asked him if he was sure they were headed in the right direction. Reluctantly the Arekuna admitted that he was not, and a question to the boat-captain brought the same reply.

"The devil!" exclaimed the explorer impatiently. "We're in a nice fix. We've been so intent on game that we've missed our way and are as good as lost. I should have known better and should have kept my bearings."

"It's a blamed sight better getting lost here than on the savanna," declared Belmont. "We won't starve to death here at any rate. But how in thunder *can* we be lost, all we've got to do is to go west? We're bound to strike the savanna in that direction."

"Surely," replied Thornton, sarcasm in his tones, "But which way is west?"

Belmont glanced about. "I'll be hanged if I know," he confessed. "Not a glimmer of sunshine; no shadows. How about moss on the trees?"

"That old scheme doesn't work in the tropics," Thornton informed him. "No, we'll have to trust to the Indian's instinct until the sun sets, we can perhaps tell by the light falling on the upper parts of the tree trunks. Meanwhile, we might as well be going one way as another, as long as we move in a straight line."

Presently Joseph announced that he thought he knew which direction was west, and following his lead, with Walters blazing the trees as they proceeded, the party went on. An hour later, the explorer again stopped them.

"We're going deeper into the bush every minute," he declared. "The sun has passed the meridian, and you can see by the light in the little opening there that we're traveling southeast. We must face about at once."

Weary and discouraged, the four retraced their way, guided by the blazed tree trunks; until the increasing dusk warned them it was time to camp. A few rods from the knoll on which they stood, there was a small brook. Several more trees were near, and feeling they might not find a better spot, preparations were at once made for passing another night. Belmont and Joseph wandered off in search of game, and near the stream secured a paca. Nothing alarming happened during the night, but rain fell towards morning and added to their discomforts, forcing them to huddle, sleepless, over the fire.

At last the faint light of dawn appeared, and as the

remnants of the evening meal were being warmed over the fire, the captain rose, remarked that he was going to the stream for a drink, and stepped from sight beyond the edge of the ridge. It was but a short distance to the brook, it was almost daylight, and no one dreamed that Walters ran the least risk of danger.

Ten minutes passed. No sounds but the twittering of birds, the patter of rain drops and the subdued voices of the men broke the silence of the forest. Suddenly—soul-piercing, blood-curdling, a scream of mortal terror ripped through the still air. The three men leaped to their feet, shaking with nameless dread, speechless, frozen to the spot at the awful sound. Again and yet again the agonized shrieks rang out; each fainter than the last, to end in a long-drawn, quavering wail—the wild, hair-raising cry of the jaguar. Then silence.

Barely five seconds had passed since the first terrible scream, but to the three men it had seemed minutes. Thornton was the first to recover his senses and to act. "Jaguar!" he cried, as he raced in the direction the captain had taken. "He's attacked Walters. Come on!"

Close at his heels came Belmont with ready gun, and at the engineer's side was Joseph with drawn machete. At the edge of the brook they stopped, amazed. There was no sign of the captain, no trace of a struggle. Utterly at a loss, they stood, searching for some mark, listening for some sound that would betray the presence of the giant cat or the injured or dead man. Then, from a distance, the jaguar screamed again, and turning, they hurried in the direction of the sound.

Suddenly Joseph uttered a frightened yell and stood shaking and trembling, pointing at the soft earth. "Kenaima!" he whispered. "Tiger Kenaima!"

Clearly visible in the damp soil were the imprints of human feet.

"Nonsense!" cried Thornton, as he carefully examined the tracks. "Those may be yours or the captain's. We've been wandering about here before."

But the Arekuna could not be convinced. "Me tellum, him Kenaima," he insisted. "Tiger no killum Walters. Tiger Kenaima catchum, me sabby."

Once more Belmont felt that tingling of his scalp, that odd sensation along his spine which had swept over him when, on the savanna, they had found the injured Indian killed by the avenger, by his mysterious, invisible uncanny enemy.

"Perhaps you're right, Joseph," said the explorer, breaking the oppressive silence. "I never heard of a jaguar attacking a man unless wounded. We'll follow these footprints and see where they lead."

Carefully parting the foliage, and keeping the tracks in view, the three crept forward, Thornton leading, Belmont with cocked gun ready for instant use, and the Arekuna, evidently expecting swift and sudden death at every turn, striving to keep as close to the protecting gun as possible.

For some distance they followed the trail to where it disappeared in a thicket so dense that it seemed impossible a human being could have forced a way through.

"Strange," muttered Thornton. "Walters had no reason to go here, and if there's an enemy lurking in there it's too dangerous to enter. We'll go around and see if the footprints come out on the other side."

The tangle, however, was larger than they had thought, and when they had skirted its edge for some distance, they came again to the brook. For a moment they hesitated, glancing about. Then Thornton uttered an ejacu-

lation of surprise and hurried towards a brownish object half-hidden among some broad-leaved plants.

"My God!" cried Belmont, as he realized what it was, and at the sight a sickly feeling of unspeakable dread possessed him. Huddled among the plants, with an expression of awful, indescribable horror on the distorted features, lay the dead body of the captain, his head crushed to a pulp by the Kenaima's club.

One swift glance was enough for Joseph. With a piercing scream, he leaped back and ran madly, blindly, from the accursed spot.

Thornton and Belmont shouted after him, commanding, threatening, but he gave no heed. Plunging into the stream, he splashed across, and without a backward glance, dashed into the forest on the farther bank.

"Come on, we musn't lose him!" yelled the explorer, and followed by the engineer, he rushed after the terror-stricken fleeing Indian.

Calling the Arekuna as they ran, they crossed the brook, and guided by the sounds of the fleeing Indian, sped through the jungle in pursuit.

Fortunately for all, it was impossible for even an Indian to make great speed through the forest, and the noise of Joseph's flight told of the struggles he was having with the dense growth. By the sounds also, the two men knew they were gaining on the Indian, but they were panting, spent, torn and scratched by thorns, when at last Joseph ceased his mad flight and they reached his side. His physical exhaustion had, however, driven away his insane terror, and he appeared thoroughly ashamed of himself for deserting his companions.

All three fully realized the terrible plight they were now in. In their mad chase they had completely lost all sense of direction. The rain still pattered down, and not a glimmer of light could be seen among the tree tops. Their only food had been abandoned, roasting over the fire, when they had dashed off at the sound of the captain's screams. They did not even know where the poor fellow's body lay, and, somewhere in the dim forest, lurking in the thickets or the impenetrable shadows, was the Kenaima with his blood-stained club, awaiting his chance to strike down another victim of his vengeance.

Food was the least of their worries. They still had the gun and ammunition, and the forest abounded with game. Even the presence of the Kenaima did not fill the white men with the abject, superstitious panic of the Indian. The one greatest peril, to their minds, lay in being lost.

"Our best chance is to find that stream,—the Belmont River as we called it," declared Thornton, when they had regained their breaths and could think calmly. As he spoke, a flicker of a smile crossed his troubled countenance as he remembered the light-hearted, boyish tomfoolery with which they had christened the stream such a short time previously. "If we can reach that," he continued, "we can follow it back to the savanna. But personally, I haven't the remotest idea where the river is."

"If we strike out in any direction, and continue to go in a straight line, we must eventually come to some river," said Belmont. "Then, by following it, we'll certainly come out somewhere. All these streams lead to rivers, and all rivers flow to the sea."

"True," agreed the explorer. "But, Frank, you don't realize what this means. Even by following a good sized stream or river it might take weeks to reach the nearest village or settlement. Our clothing would be in shreds, our shoes worn through and your last cartridge

used, long before we reached a human habitation. There's only one faint hope for us. If we don't strike the stream we want, we may find one that will float a raft or a woodskin, and we might reach settlements in that way. We'd run terrific chances of destruction in falls and rapids, but we'll have to take the chance. But first of all we must eat. Our lives depend upon our health and strength."

An hour's hunt resulted in a curassow or "powi," and having dined on this, they marched in single file through the forest, marking their trail as they went, striving to keep a straight course, and buoying themselves up with the hopes of finding a stream which would lead them to the savanna, or would carry them to civilization and safety.

As is always the case in the tropical bush, little game was about during the day, but towards sundown Belmont shot a monkey. A few moments later, Joseph gave a glad shout. To their ears came the welcome sound of running water, a brighter light showed between the trees ahead, and hurrying forward, they came to the bank of a good-sized stream flowing swiftly over its pebbly bed. It was not deep, and as there was a fairly open space on the opposite bank, Thornton suggested crossing over in order to camp in the open.

"I've been thinking over matters while we walked," he announced, as they splashed through the rivulet. "I've come to the conclusion that we needn't fear the Kenaima. That jaguar cry signifies triumph. The avenger is never supposed to utter a sound until his mission is completed. I'm sure he has returned to his people, fully satisfied that the blood debt of his tribesmen has been wiped out. Moreover, I feel certain that this stream is the river the Peaiman referred to. In the first place, it's hardly probable that there are two large streams in the forest within the area we've covered; and if it is the stream, no one but the Peaiman himself would dare cross it for fear of evil beings and devils."

"Maybe you're right, Ned," agreed Belmont. "And I hope you are, especially in respect to the identity of this stream. I feel a lot easier over here in the 'devils' country than back in the bush with that damnable Kenaima."

As Joseph built a fire and roasted the monkey, the two men discussed the possibilities of descending the stream.

"If it's the one you think it is, then it's probably the one you named for me," argued Belmont. "So why not turn about and follow it back to the savanna?"

"Several reasons," replied the other. "If it's that stream, and I only assumed that it might be when I spoke of it before, it must travel a long distance through the forest to increase to such proportions. Neither our clothes, our strength, nor your ammunition would last until we could get back to the savanna and the Pianoghotto by that route. No, our best chance is to drift down the current. Our clothes will be saved, we will conserve our strength, there is doubtless plenty of fish further down, and unless we are wrecked in some unexpected rapid or cataract we'll reach some settlement eventually."

"We'll have to foot it for a long way yet," declared Belmont, glancing at the stream. "This creek wouldn't float a skiff, let alone a raft."

"It will float a woodskin, however," replied the explorer, "and that's better than a raft, especially in case we come to bad rapids or falls. Joseph can make a

woodskin in a day, and meanwhile we can rest. There's plenty of game hereabouts, and there may be fish. Altogether I think we're in luck."

"Yes, I suppose we are," agreed the engineer. "But it's the devil of a windup for our expedition,—and not even a nugget to show for it all."

Nothing disturbed them that night, and at daybreak Joseph started to work on the woodskin which all hoped would carry them to safety.

A large purple-heart tree was found, and the Indian cut a perpendicular slit through the thick smooth bark with horizontal cuts around the trunk, eighteen feet apart. Wedges were then driven under the edges of the cut, and in an hour's time, he had forced off a great cylinder of bark eighteen feet long and nearly four feet in diameter. In the meantime, Belmont had shot a curassow, and Thornton had caught a mess of crawfish in the river. There was no danger of starving, and while the roll of bark was soaking in the shallow water, Joseph busied himself making a bow and arrows. The weapons, to be sure, were somewhat crude, and lacked the beautiful finish and symmetry of the Guiana Indians' weapons. But the Arekuna found everything he required provided by a bountiful nature and accustomed as he was to working with few and simple tools, he turned out very efficient weapons. The leaves of a palm supplied fibre for string. Arrow-canes by the riverside furnished shafts. The arrow heads were made from hard wood and bones, and a dead, seasoned limb of a letter-wood tree was hewn, whittled and shaped into a six-foot bow. Belmont, however, was rather skeptical as to Joseph's ability to secure game with the primitive weapons. But the Indian merely grinned, and, as soon as his bow and arrows were completed, he rose and went towards the river. Wading cautiously, he approached a deep pool among the rocks. Then, fitting an arrow to the string, he drew the bow quickly, the long shaft flashed into the water, and leaping forward, the Indian retrieved his missile with a ten-pound fish struggling on the barbed point.

Belmont was convinced. There was no longer any fear of running short of food, even if his ammunition gave out, and at Thornton's suggestion, it was decided to let the Arekuna do the hunting and thus conserve the cartridges for possible emergencies.

In the afternoon, the roll of bark was taken from the water, Joseph bent the ends together, secured them with tough vines, forced hard wood spreaders between the sides, and the light buoyant canoe was complete.

"Some boat builder," commented Belmont approvingly, "But it's a devilish cranky-looking craft. And how about those open ends? If we hit rough water it will fill."

Thornton laughed. "If water comes in one end it can run out the other," he said. "But all joking aside, there's no danger. You'll find a woodskin is steadier than a birch bark canoe, and the open ends are well above the water line."

Joseph now was busy getting paddles, and again the engineer's admiration was aroused at the Arekuna's knowledge of natural resources. To have hewn paddles from tough wood with only a machete, would have been a long, hard job. The Indian, however, had no intention of attempting such labor. He picked out a small tree with deeply-fluted trunk, the ridges on which were as thin and flat as boards. Splitting these off, he had only to chop them into shape and the paddles were ready.

The explorer chuckled at Belmont's freely expressed surprise. "The Indians always use that species of tree for paddles," he explained. "It's native name is 'yaruri' or 'massara,' both of which mean the same thing—paddle-wood."

"If I stay in this bush much longer, I'll be looking for trees bearing guns, and with pods full of powder and shot," laughed the engineer. "And it's too bad there isn't a salt plant or a cigar bush, somewhere about. I'm dying for a smoke, and salt would be a blessing on this meat."

Thornton grinned. "I'm afraid you'll have to forego salt, Frank," he said, "but you needn't go without your smoke. Joseph, 'spose can catchum pipa?"

The Arekuna nodded. "Sure, me sabby catchum," he replied, and stepped into the bush.

"Jove, you don't mean to tell me there's tobacco here!" exclaimed Belmont.

Thornton, however, merely smiled, and presently the Indian returned. Without a word, he handed each of the men a bulky, cheroot-like affair of delicate paper-like bark filled with some finely shredded material.

"Light up, it won't bite," laughed the explorer, as Belmont sniffed suspiciously at the thing.

"I'll try anything once," he declared, and lighting the cheroot, he took a tentative whiff.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he ejaculated, inhaling a cloud of the fragrant smoke. "Next best thing to a real Havana."

"Well fed, refreshed, and feeling strangely secure and at ease, the three rested throughout the day. They slept undisturbed, and arose at dawn prepared to set out on their trip down the unknown river. Joseph, who had lost all fear of the Kenaima, slipped into the jungle, and soon returned with several birds and a large land tortoise, and thus provided with food for the next two meals, the men launched their woodskin and embarked. With Thornton in the bow, Belmont amidships, and Joseph in the stern, the craft was pushed from shore, and with a stroke of his paddle, the Indian drove the canoe into midstream. Light as a leaf, it floated; the current seized it; and the next instant the three men were being borne swiftly down the river.

For mile after mile they sped on without effort. The stream increased in size rapidly, numerous creeks flowed into it, and always, above the banks, towered the forest. North, south, east and west the river wound, and at each sharp bend, the woodskin's speed was checked and it was paddled slowly close to the shore, while its occupants listened intently, for they never knew when a rapid or cataract might be expected. No falls or bad rapids were met that day, however, and by mid-afternoon, a range of distant blue mountains loomed above the forest. As these presaged cataracts and rapids, it was decided to make camp and not attempt to go farther. They landed on a sandy strip of beach, the canoe was drawn well up from the water, and while the two white men gathered palm leaves for a shelter and wood for a fire, Joseph strolled down the stream with his bow and arrow, searching for fish. All were elated at the distance they had safely covered. No longer was there any fear of the Kenaima, for he and the Aurimeonas were many miles astern, the three felt sure. Although still hemmed in by forest, yet, if no accident occurred, their craft could carry them safely to the settlements, and there was no fear of going hungry. Barring some unforeseen and unexpected mishap, they were practically at the end of

their troubles. Engrossed in these thoughts, the two men were busily erecting their rude shelter when Joseph dashed into view, tearing madly up the beach as if the Kenaima were at his heels. Instantly they knew something serious and alarming had occurred, for the Indian's eyes were wide with terror, his face was ashen and he shook as if with a chill.

"What's wrong?" cried Thornton, anxiety in his voice. For answer Joseph flung himself on the explorer and clung to him wildly.

"Didoes!" he chattered. "Devils! Me seeum! Two, t'ree devils! Wai-Wai!"

Thornton vainly endeavored to obtain some intelligible statement from the terrified Indian. But to all his queries, Joseph merely reiterated: "Devils! Me seeum devils!"

"What in blazes *has* he seen, do you suppose?" exclaimed Belmont.

"I don't know, but something that's frightened him half out of his wits," replied the explorer. "We'll have to investigate. Come on, Joseph, where's your devil?"

The Arekuna only clung the tighter to Thornton, and fairly sobbed. "No makeum walk that side," he pleaded. "Devils eatum."

"Shut up," ordered Thornton, losing patience and quite forgetting to speak in talky-talky. "I don't know *what* you saw, but you're a blithering idiot. There's no devil. Either come along or stay here. We're going to find what scared you."

With difficulty, he loosened the frenzied grasp of the Indian, and with Belmont, started down stream in the direction whence Joseph had come. The Indian, however, was more fearful of being left alone than of facing whatever he had seen, and cringing and trembling, he kept close to the white men.

A short distance down the beach they came to a tiny cove and Thornton abruptly halted with a surprised ejaculation, gazing fixedly at the damp sand.

And as the other saw what had attracted his attention, he too, drew a sharp quick breath, while the Indian cowered with abject terror between the two. Plainly impressed upon the sand were immense human footprints. The two Americans exchanged quick glances, and each read in the other's eyes his unspoken thoughts. What manner of men had left those footprints on the sand? Were they hostile savages or was the dread Kenaima still lurking close at hand? Neither, however, saw anything incomprehensible or supernatural about the tell-tale impressions which would account for Joseph's terror. Whoever might be near, they were determined to learn his identity, and they crept cautiously forward, following the tracks that led towards a brushy point a hundred yards distant.

As they reached the thicket, which extended almost to the river's edge, a whiff of smoke was borne to their nostrils, and from beyond the barrier of brush, came sounds of low guttural voices. With the utmost caution, they crawled to the edge of the growth and peered through the leaves and branches.

Beyond the strip of brush was a little lagoon or back-water, landlocked by a sandbar overgrown with canes, and from its farther side a small grassy area extended to the edge of the forest. But neither of the men gave any heed to the surroundings of the spot. Their gaze was rivetted in fascinated horror upon the scene before them. Squatting upon the grass about a fire, were three gigantic, naked beings. Their skins were as black as ebony, their heads were covered with tangled manes of

coarse red hair, and their thick lips and their ears were distended and made hideous by great disks of wood inserted in them. But even more terrifying than these monstrous, repulsive beings was the other sight that held the gaze of the three men. Spitted like a fowl upon a stout stake, and roasting over the fire, was the flayed and disemboweled body of a human being! Then their glance fell upon another object lying upon the grass, and instantly they realized whose corpse was being cooked to provide a cannibal feast. Leering hideously at the sky was the severed head of the Aurimeona medicine-man!

The next instant the spell was broken. Joseph had seen the ghastly head and spitted body, and emitting a horrified shriek, he leaped up and dashed madly from the scene.

His cry was echoed by a wild, demoniacal yell from the cannibals. The two white men, knowing they were discovered, raced after the fleeing Indian as they had never run before. Their only hope lay in reaching the canoe and taking to the river before their pursuers overtook them, and abject terror lent speed to their flying feet. Nearer and nearer came the horrible cries of the cannibals. The canoe was in sight, and Belmont caught a glimpse of Joseph trying to push the craft to the water's edge. The race might yet be won and then. . . a bit of driftwood buried in the sand caught Thornton's foot, tripping him and throwing him headlong to the beach. Belmont knew that before his comrade could regain his feet their pursuers would be upon him. With the quickness of thought, he stopped, wheeled, dropped to one knee and fired both barrels of his gun at the oncoming savages. At the report, one of the giant cannibals spun like a top and fell writhing on the sand. Instantly the others stopped, and as the wounded monster screeched with agony and clutched at his bleeding breast, one of his fellows swung a heavy bludgeon and brought it crashing on the wounded savage's head, while the third plunged a stone-headed spear into his throat. This cold-blooded slaughter delayed the cannibals merely a few seconds, but it was the salvation of the fugitives. Thornton had time to scramble to his feet, and together he and Belmont dashed to the canoe, leaped into it, and shoving it from the beach, plied their paddles furiously. By the time the baffled cannibals reached the shore, the woodskin bearing its occupants was far beyond their reach and was speeding downstream to the sweep of the current.

"Whew, that *was* a close shave!" gasped Belmont. "No wonder Joseph thought them devils."

"It would have been all up with us if it hadn't been for you," declared Thornton. "God grant they haven't boats farther downstream."

"Did you see who they'd killed?" asked the engineer.

The explorer nodded. "Yes," he replied. "We'll never know how the Peaiman met such a fate. His charms must have failed to work for once. Poor rascal! He wasn't far from the truth when he said this place was full of devils."

"You don't catch me ever doubting an Indian's yarn again, no matter how nonsensical it sounds," announced Belmont. Then, with a new note of terror in his tones, he yelled: "My God! We're done for! Look, there are more of them!"

The woodskin had swung around a bend, and, just beyond, a dyke of rock extended across the river like a natural dam. Between the ledges the water foamed and boiled, but at one point, midway between the banks,

was an open space where the stream poured smoothly, but with terrific speed, between the barriers. Upon the dyke, leaping from rock to rock, and yelling like fiends, was a score of the monstrous black cannibals. It was impossible to check the canoe already in the drag of the current and to run it ashore would mean instant capture and death. There was no alternative but to go on, and Belmont's blood ran cold at thought of passing within a few yards, perhaps a few feet, of the blood-thirsty savages. To fall into their hands would be worse than death in the rapids, which death to his mind, appeared inevitable.

Already, Joseph had headed the woodskin for the narrow opening between the rocks, and the next instant, the craft shot forward with dizzy speed. Had the Arekuna lost his head, had his hands trembled or his nerves failed him, disaster for all would have been certain. But Joseph was no coward. He had been terrified when he had first seen the cannibals, for he had thought them supernatural beings—the devils of Indian superstition. But once he had realized they were mortal, and had seen that they could be killed like any other men, he had no more fear of them than of any other enemy, a wounded jaguar or a venomous snake.

With the consummate skill of a born riverman, perfect master of his frail craft, and looking neither to right nor left at the howling cannibals, he guided the woodskin through the unknown rapids with mind and eyes centered on the rocks and whirlpools to the exclusion of all else. As the canoe swept by the first rocks, the nearest savage was within a dozen yards, and with a howl of rage he lifted his club and swung it as if about to hurl it at the passing boat. But the missile never left his hand. Risking a capsize by his action, Belmont fired at the fellow as the canoe swept past, and dropping club and spear the cannibal fell screaming into the churning water.

At the flash of the gun and the roar of the report, the others seemed panic stricken, and turning about, rushed madly for the shore. The next moment the canoe had passed the rapids and shot forth upon the tranquil waters below the dyke. But the perils of the three were not yet over. The cannibals had fled to the shore in terror at the report of Belmont's gun and at the death of their comrade, but they had now regained some of their brute courage and were racing downstream along the banks.

"They're after us again!" cried the engineer. "But we're gaining on them. Jove! Can't the beggars run, though?"

"I'm worried," declared Thornton. "They seem too darned cock-sure of getting us. There may be falls or rapids that we can't run or they may have boats somewhere ahead."

Hardly had he ceased speaking when a cry from Joseph drew the attention of the two men to the river ahead. They had been swept around an S-shaped bend, and directly ahead of them a precipitous wall of rock towered for over one hundred feet above the river. Straight towards the cliff the water flowed, to disappear in a black rift in the granite, a cleft that reached from base to summit of the precipice, a cañon with overhanging sides which almost met to form a natural tunnel.

"It's the Peaiman's 'hole in the ground'," cried Thornton.

"And what those black devils are counting on," exclaimed Belmont. "Look, they're gathering where the river narrows. We've got to land where they can't get us or else go into that damned hole!"

"Even if we take to the tunnel, they'll get us," shouted the explorer. "They're climbing up the rocks above the opening."

The occupants of the canoe had no choice, however. Even had they decided to run their craft ashore and take their chances with the cannibals, they would have been powerless to do so. The woodskin was seized as if by an invisible hand, it was rushed forward by the force of the irresistible current sweeping toward the yawning opening in the cliff, and the canoe sped, straight as an arrow, for the tunnel. In an instant, it seemed, the three men were close to the first of the cannibals. Each second they expected a shower of rocks and missiles to strike them down and destroy their frail canoe. And then a strange, amazing, inexplicable thing happened.

With one accord, the black savages dropped their crude weapons, their savage triumphant cries changed to a mournful, dismal wail, and prostrating themselves they grovelled on the ground, as though the occupants of the canoe were deities to whom they gave obeisance.

"Devilish impressive farewell!" yelled Thornton, raising his voice to make it audible above the roar of water and the dirge-like wail of the cannibals.

"It sounds like a funeral to me—our funeral. Hold tight, Frank. Trust to Providence and—good bye, old man, if we never get through here."

Belmont turned shouting at the top of his lungs. "Guess those devils knew it was all up with us, Ned. Good bye, old friend. I——"

His words were drowned in the deafening roar as the canoe shot into the black hole and semi-darkness, while from the rocky walls, the rushing waters echoed and reverberated with a noise like thunder.

"Duck your heads!" screamed Thornton, and his voice came faint as a whisper in the turmoil.

His warning came just in time. As they crouched low, Belmont felt his back scraped by the jutting overhanging rocks, and he threw himself flat in the bottom of the woodskin. How long they sped onward through the Stygian blackness of that awful hole, they never knew. But to them, lying in the fragile craft, carried by the will of the mad waters, bobbing, tossing, spinning like a top; bumping against the rocks; fearful that at any moment they would plunge over a cataract or that the canoe would be ground to pieces, they seemed to be hours within the bowels of the mountain.

That they would ever come through alive, none dared hope. It seemed utterly impossible that the tiny woodskin could survive and all had given themselves up for lost when there was a glad shout from Thornton in the bow. "Sunlight ahead!" he yelled. "We're almost through."

Belmont raised his head and peered about. In the distance, a mere pinpoint of bright light showed in the blackness. Rapidly it increased in size; the current became less terrific, and Joseph seized his paddle to steer the canoe on a straight course. In the light beyond the opening they could see the surface of the river dancing and sparkling in the sun, and in a moment more they were swept out of darkness into daylight, into the clear, sweet, blessed air with blue sky arching overhead, and all glorious with the golden glow of the sun in the west.

They stared about in wonder. Behind them rose the towering cliffs with the gaping cleft through which they had been borne, and before them stretched the gently flowing river. But where were the dense forests, the im-

penetrable jungles, the broad savannas? On every hand rose precipices and cliffs of red and yellow rock, their strata worn and carved by the elements into fantastic shapes. Great spire-like pinnacles, fluted and ornate columns, battlements and enormous grottoes were on every side. Slender pillars bore titanic boulders balanced on their tips. Huge rocks were poised on the brink of sheer cliffs, as if about to crash thundering down at a breath, and slender arches of rock spanned deep rifts, through which plunged flashing streams.

Straight from the river's side the strange rock forms rose; sometimes receding in terrace after terrace; again overhanging and leaving a mere thread of sky between their beetling brows. Not a tree was visible. Here and there in crevices among the rocks, were sharp-pointed fleshy-leaved Agaves. Climbing cacti draped many of the cliffs, and wherever water trickled over the stones, strange and brilliant flowered orchids grew in profusion.

"Jove, it's a marvelous sight!" exclaimed the engineer. "It beats 'the Grand Cañon'."

"And 'the Garden of the Gods', too," declared Thornton. "Lord, but this is a wonderful discovery!"

Fascinated as they were by the wonder of their surroundings, yet the men could spare little time in idle admiration. The sun was already dropping towards the summit of the cliffs, shadows were filling the ravines, and it was imperative that they should hurry on and find some place in which to pass the fast approaching night. Presently they found a tiny strip of sand between the jutting cliffs, and running the canoe ashore, they hurried to gather fragments of driftwood and start a fire. Fortunately, their game had been left in the canoe, when they had stopped before, and, as they ate their welcome meal, the two Americans discussed their adventures and their almost miraculous escape.

"Why do you imagine those brutes gave us that funeral send off?" asked Belmont. "Just when we were within their reach they quit cold, and seemed overcome with emotion at our leaving them. They're a rum lot of beggars."

"I don't know, but I can make a good guess," replied Thornton. "They probably consider the tunnel the entrance to another world. Perhaps the abode of spirits. Evidently they don't possess boats and of course they have never before seen a white man or heard a gun shot. Such things must have seemed almost supernatural to them, and when they saw us heading straight for the opening they were convinced that we were supernatural beings, and consequently fell down to worship us, or perhaps to implore our forgiveness for having attacked us."

"Yes, that must be the explanation," agreed the engineer. "But why in thunder couldn't they have caught the idea and kow-towed to us sooner? I tell you, I was scared, and I don't mind admitting it. But I suppose we're safe enough here."

"Undoubtedly as far as the cannibals are concerned," the other assured him. "And no more fear of the Kenaima, that's certain. I expect the old medicine-man was playing the Kenaima part and lying in wait for us when he met his fate. But of course there may be rapids or cataracts ahead."

"I hope the exit from this place isn't *via* another black hole," said Belmont. "I wonder if old Billikins knew about this spot."

"If he did, I'll wager that he never visited it by the route we took," replied Thornton. "I doubt if any human being ever before set foot here. It's totally unlike any-

thing else in Guiana. And those cannibals are as totally unlike any other race in South America. I've been thinking about them ever since we first saw them."

"You don't imagine you're the only one who's had them in mind, do you?" exclaimed the engineer. "Great Scott! do you suppose I thought they were nice, jolly boys anxious to play tag with us?"

"You don't understand what I mean," explained the explorer. "What troubles me is who or what they are. They're not like Indians,—too black, and their features are different."

"Not to mention their hair," added the other. "Who ever heard of a red headed Indian?"

"That's of no consequence," declared Thornton. "They may dye or bleach their hair,—I noticed that several had black hair. I'd like to know where they came from, originally."

"I'll be hanged if I care," said Belmont. "But if you ask me, I'll say they came straight from Hades. Honestly, though, couldn't they be descendants or runaway slaves—like the Bush Niggers over in Surinam?"

Joseph, who had been listening intently and trying to catch the meaning of the conversation, suddenly spoke up. "Him feller paintum black," he announced. "Him no gottum black skin like so."

"What?" demanded Thornton. "How you sabby?"

The Indian grinned. "Me sabby," he declared. "Me seeum him dead feller in river. Plenty paint wash off when water catchum."

"Well I'll be dashed!" ejaculated Thornton. "And I thought them really negroid. Well, that shows how keenly observant these Indians are. But if they're Indians, they're an unknown race. There's a wonderful field for study and investigation here."

"You're welcome to investigate them all you wish," remarked Belmont. "But if you take my advice you'll wear armor and carry a machine gun when you come back to study your cannibal friends. If those beasts are real one hundred per cent Americans, they're nothing for the country to be proud of."

Thornton laughed heartily at Belmont's serious tones. "Why," he exclaimed, "Think of the opportunities for the march of civilization. Can't you picture the rush of missionaries to these benighted heathens, once their presence is known? And think of their value to science!"

"I can easily picture missionaries being rushed into the heathens' stomachs," declared the engineer, grimly. "And I'll bet they'll never be as valuable to science as scientists will be to them,—if they try to study the beggars. No, I can't see much glory or value in being skinned and eaten."

Thornton chuckled. "I don't know but you're right," he admitted. "I confess that I failed to appreciate their ethnological features, when they chased us up the beach. For once, Frank, I'm willing to admit that even scientific interest has its limits. Thank Heaven, whoever they are, they're the other side of the mountain. And now let's get a good night's rest."

The summits of the peaks were a gleam with golden light when the three in the cañon opened their eyes the next morning. But the sun had not yet risen above the encircling barriers or cliffs when breakfast was over, the canoe was launched and the journey downstream was resumed.

There was practically no current, and for hour after hour they drifted along, paddling easily and listening for the sound of possible rapids ahead. They were traveling

through a wonderland with the stream twisting and turning in a bewildering manner, and often dividing the flowing on either side of lofty water-worn columns of rock, and once it broadened into a lake-like expanse dotted with numerous columns, standing above the surface like the ruins of a submerged city. Sundown still found them in the vast cañon, hemmed in by stupendous cliffs. But the mountains were less precipitous, and trees and other vegetation clothed the hollows and river banks with green. Again they camped by the riverside, eating the last of their smoked game together with several fish which Joseph shot in the stream. By dawn they were up again, and about an hour after embarking as they passed an outjutting point, the roar of falling water reached their ears, and they saw that the river ended in an abrupt line clear-cut against the sky beyond.

"Cataract," announced Thornton.

Instantly the woodskin was run ashore, and the three occupants disembarked and made their way along the shore to examine the falls that barred their progress.

The brush here was thick; numerous large trees towered above the shorter palms and bushes, and the ground was rough and broken. Steadily they pushed on, cutting a narrow path as they advanced, guiding their footsteps by the roar of the cataract which was now close at hand.

At last forcing their way through the final barrier, they came out upon a narrow rock shelf, and exclamations of wonder came from their lips. Almost at their feet the waterfall plunged for fully two hundred feet,—a magnificent spectacle in itself. But they gave little heed to it, for their gaze was fixed upon the marvelous scene spread before them.

Surrounded by low, forest-covered hills, was a broad, green valley, and in its centre,—like a bowl of quicksilver, gleamed a circular lake a mile or more in diameter. The likeness to a gigantic bowl was still further heightened by a bare ridge of white that completely encircled the shimmering sheet of water and stood forth, sharp and clear, against the surrounding greenery. Across the plain from the cataract the river wound to the lake, and, from the opposite side, flowed on to disappear in two glistening ribbons in the distant forest. But the fair valley, the placid lake in its crater-like hollow, and the river, were merely accessories,—a lovely setting, for that which held the men spellbound upon the cliff.

Close to the border of the lake, and spreading like a huge fan across the plain, were the broad streets and countless buildings of a great city. And striking through a rift in the hills above the waterfall, the rays of the rising sun fell full upon the city by the lake, and the massive buildings gleamed in the light like burnished gold.

"Manoa! The city of El Dorado!" exclaimed Belmont in awed tones.

"But in ruins," said Thornton.

There could be no doubt of it. The three were looking upon that wondrous, supposedly mythical city, that had lured Raleigh on and had led so many to their deaths,—the lost city of Manoa, the kingdom of El Dorado.

But no sign of life was there. No moving figures thronged the silent streets, and even from where Thornton and Belmont stood they could see that many of the once magnificent buildings were now shapeless piles of crumbled masonry.

"Wake me up," cried Belmont. "I must be dreaming."

"Then we all are," declared the explorer. "Hello! Look at Joseph."

The Indian was prostrate, his forehead bowed to the rocks, as if in adoration of the valley and the ruined city.

"He's worshipping the gods of his ancestors," said Thornton, lowering his voice. "But he has no more idea of what he's doing, or why he does it, than you have. It's a case of unconscious reversion to long forgotten ancestral belief."

Presently the Indian rose, a rather puzzled expression on his features which, as Belmont said, looked as if he had just waked up from a dream.

"It's no use trying to get the woodskin down there," announced the explorer. "We'll have to climb down and build another canoe on the river below the falls. Come on, I'm anxious to get a closer view of that city."

"Do you know," cried the engineer, as the three commenced clambering down the mountain side, "I understand that old 'Golden City' story now. The sun makes it look like gold. If old El Dorado wasn't any more genuine gold than his city was he wouldn't be worth a whoop."

To descend the cliff was a difficult and dangerous undertaking. The rock was little more than tufa, soft and crumbling, and at every step, masses of the material were dislodged and went crashing down to the vegetation far below. The Indian's bare feet found little trouble in securing a grip on the steep slope, but the soles of the white men's shoes slipped and slid, and a dozen times both men came within an ace of falling down to their deaths.

The descent was finally accomplished in safety, however, and panting and breathless, the three stood upon the plain and gazed about. When they had looked down upon the valley from above, it had appeared as level as a floor and seemed carpeted with short soft grass. But they now found that it was far from being a level plain, and overgrown with long wiry grass and rank thorny weeds, which formed a tangled jungle through which it was practically impossible to force a way. The shores of the stream were fairly open, however, and afforded a pathway, and following along the winding stream, they hurried towards the distant city. It was farther than they had thought, but finally they saw the white rim of the lake before them, with a deep cleft, through which the river flowed. Here there was no space to walk beside the stream, and turning aside, they started to climb the bank. From a distance the ridge had looked as if composed of white sand and pebbles, but they now found that it was a tumbled mass of broken stone, great boulders, pebbles and gravel; bare of all vegetation; scintillating with the reflected heat of the sun, and as steep as the roof of a house. Panting and perspiring, crawling over the rocks, slipping on loose stones, sinking ankle deep in the powdery sand, they struggled on. Suddenly Thornton stopped, reached down and picked up a dark colored, rock-like object.

"Here's the solution to some of the puzzles," he announced, tossing the thing to the engineer. "Meteorite. Same as the Peaiman fire-stone. It accounts for the lake, for this pile of broken rock and for a lot of other things."

"By Jove, you're right!" exclaimed Belmont. "But you'll have to elucidate about it being the key to the mysteries. I don't see what this bit of some celestial body has to do with the lake or this ridge."

"Simple," panted the explorer. "Ever hear of Meteor

Crater or Devil's Mountain in far-off, remote Arizona.

"Sure," replied Belmont. Then, a sudden light dawning on him, he cried: "Great Scott, of course! You mean this lake is in a crater made by a gigantic meteor?"

"No doubt about it," declared the other. "This ridge is identical with the rim of the Arizona crater—the same crushed quartz, pulverized gravel and all. The only difference is that this one is full of water."

"Blamed interesting," commented Belmont, glancing about. The next second he gave a shout, and leaping forward, picked up a dull yellow pebble. "Gold, by Jove!" he cried. "Damned if we haven't struck old Billikin's gold mine!"

Thornton chuckled. "Remember what Raleigh said: 'Peeces of golde the bignesse of egges on the shores of the lake'? Perhaps he wasn't exaggerating after all."

Belmont scarcely heard the other's words. On his hands and knees, he was feverishly scraping among the sand and pebbles, and uttering surprised and delighted cries as nugget after nugget was disclosed.

"I wonder if that blessed meteor brought down the gold," he exclaimed, as he stopped long enough to wipe his streaming face.

"Scarcely," replied Thornton, "but it's easy to understand that the meteor was responsible for its presence. There was undoubtedly a rich vein, and the force of the striking meteorite split and pulverized the rock and exposed the gold. But come along, Frank. This gold has been here for ages, and it's not going to vanish at once. It's hotter than Hades here, I want to see the city."

"Blast the city!" burst out the engineer. But, realizing the truth of his friend's words, he rose reluctantly and resumed his way toward the summit of the ridge. They were now within half a mile of the vast ruin, and filled with curiosity and interest, they hurried toward the nearest buildings, while behind, ill at ease and with frightened eyes, came the Indian.

"Me no likeum," he exclaimed, as they approached the ruins. "Me sabby him plenty peai (magic)."

"Don't make for 'fraid," said Thornton. "Why you no likeum? House all same dead. Him-feller what liveum this place all same dead."

"Me tellum same place peai," reasserted the Arekuna. "Long time peai. All feller Buckmans (Indians) sabby for long time him peai place."

"Ha!" ejaculated the explorer. "So the Indians all know of this place. Why you no tellum you sabby this place?"

Joseph cast down his eyes, dug his toes into the sand and hesitated. "Me no sabby what side this place," he declared at last. "Buckmans sabby him some place. No sabby more."

"Hmm, perhaps that's true," muttered Thornton. "Maybe the Indians merely know the same old story of Manoa without knowing its location."

"I'll bet old Billikins sabbyed it at any rate," laughed Belmont, as he strode forward. "And I'll bet its bad reputation is what kept those black devils from coming down here."

They were now close to the buildings, and found the city even more desolate and ruined than they had thought. The streets, which had appeared wide and straight for a distance, were uneven, full of holes and chasms, and in places were choked with debris which had fallen from the buildings. The edifices, that had seemed impressive from afar, were sagging, their walls cracked and crumbling, their roofs fallen in, and their

carved cornices and ornate columns lay shattered on the pavements.

"Looks like one of those shelled towns in France," commented the engineer. "See that, Ned. Look at those houses across the street. They're half-buried under the ridge—I've seen buildings half-covered by a shell crater rim in just that way."

"Gad, yes!" ejaculated the other. "I believe that explains everything. I've been wondering what destroyed the place. But now I understand. The city *was* shelled. It's been bombarded by a more destructive shell than anything fired from modern guns. The city was destroyed by the same gigantic meteor, or by the concentrated shower of meteors, that threw up that ridge."

"Tell that to the marines!" scoffed the engineer. "Maybe these houses may have been a bit peppered or shaken, but no meteorite could have wiped out a city of this size. Why, some of the buildings are a mile from the ridge"

Thornton laughed drily. "Can you conceive of the shock which must have resulted when such a meteor struck?" he asked. "It had force enough to dig a pit a mile in diameter, and Lord knows how deep, in solid rock, and to throw up a ridge of pulverized granite and quartz nearly one hundred feet high. Just stop to recall to your mind the concussion and shock made by those big shells during the war—missiles only a few inches in diameter, and then try to imagine a white hot mass of metal weighing hundreds of thousands of tons, and perhaps one thousand feet in diameter, striking with even greater force than any shell. Why, man alive, if a meteor like that hit the earth somewhere near New York it would destroy every vestige of life within a radius of several hundred miles! Think of the gases and heat it must have generated. I'm amazed that a trace of the city remains. Undoubtedly the greater part of it was pulverized and forms part of the ridge."

"By Jove, I guess you're right, at that," admitted Belmont. "Just the same, as Raleigh's yarn had Manoa beside a lake, it must have been the same way clear back in his day. And in that case what became of old El Dorado and his folks?"

"Probably there has always been a lake here," replied Thornton. "And I'd wager that the city was destroyed ages before the first Europeans came to America. The story of El Dorado has probably been handed down from the days before the place was wiped out."

"Don't know as I give a whoop, whether 'twas or not," declared the engineer, "provided I can get the gold old El Dorado left. Come on, Ned, let's take a stroll up Main Street."

"Funny thing, that the place isn't overgrown with jungle," remarked Belmont, as they reached the nearest pavement. "It looks as if a street-cleaning gang had been at work—hardly any grass in the streets, and only a few small trees among the ruins."

"Yes, that's a puzzle to me, also," admitted the other. "Probably something about the soil—same reason the ridge is still bare."

Despite Belmont's flippant manner, he admitted that he felt awed and impressed at standing in this dead city of a bygone past, and as they sauntered along, the explorer was constantly uttering enthusiastic comments regarding the archeological treasures and wonders revealed.

"Frank!" he exclaimed. "I'd go through all we have

a dozen times over, just for this. It's the greatest discovery ever made in America. I'm beginning to believe it's the most ancient city of the New World. No one has ever before seen similar carvings and architecture."

"I wonder what the people were like," said Belmont. "They were darned good architects, I'll admit. Those buildings ahead are fine, and they don't appear to be in bad shape."

As the two proceeded farther and farther from the lake, the buildings appeared more and more intact, and they also appeared to be of a better class, with more ornate and beautiful carvings decorating the stone work.

"Look at that building!" cried the explorer, gripping his friend's arm. "The walls lean outward like those of some Mayan buildings, but in every other detail it's wholly different."

"By Jove, they didn't use mortar, either," exclaimed the engineer, who was examining the walls. "And I'd like to know what sort of tools they used. This stone is diorite and harder than Pharaoh's heart. Come on, let's go inside. There's no one to take our cards, but the door's wide open."

The two entered the wide portal, flanked by weirdly-carved columns, while Joseph followed at their heels looking, "like a dog with his tail between his legs," as Belmont expressed it.

"Funny that the roof has fallen in and yet there are no signs of it on the floor," commented Belmont, as they glanced curiously about.

Thornton looked up at the summits of the high walls. "If it ever had a roof it was of thatch, or merely an awning," he declared. "The edges of the walls are smooth—not crumbled or broken except in one spot. That's where a stone came tumbling through. See it, lying over there?" He pointed to an irregular boulder in one corner of the immense room.

"Probably ricocheted in here when the meteor struck," remarked the other, as he approached it. "Great Scott, Ned, it's a meteor itself!"

"Now perhaps you can realize the force of the meteorite," said Thornton. "This is a small fragment, but it weighs over a dozen tons and has gone three feet deep into the solid stone flooring."

"I'm sorry for the folks who were here when that baby came in," was Belmont's comment.

From the room where the three men stood, several doorways opened, and the two white men entered one after another, Belmont searching for possible treasure, while Thornton was engrossed in archeological studies. But every room appeared to be empty except for piles of dust and bits of highly decorated pottery lying cracked and broken on the floors.

"What do you suppose made these dust heaps?" asked the engineer, as he poked one with his toe. "They look as though some chambermaid had swept them into piles ready to take out."

"They're all that remains of wooden furniture, I think," replied the explorer. "These jars once stood on tables or benches, and when the wood rotted away they fell down and smashed."

"Wish they'd left a few chairs or a good bed," laughed Belmont. "They were an inhospitable bunch, not to think of some stranger dropping in."

As he spoke, they were passing a low, dark opening in the wall. The next instant the engineer sprang back

(Continued on page 954)

The Pool of Death

By Bob Olsen

Author of "Captain Brink of the Space Marines," "The Ant with a Human Soul," etc.

'A MASTER MYSTERY STORY'

WE have here the description of another investigation by the Master of Mystery, with excellent character descriptions and absolutely unanticipated denouement. The reader will be held in complete suspense up to the last paragraphs.

Illustrated by MOREY

CHAPTER I

A Distinguished Visitor

"I'M sorry," Miss Walker said. "Mr. Pryor is extremely busy to-day. He has given me definite instructions that he is not to be disturbed, no matter who calls."

"But don't you think that if he knew—"

The visitor stopped with her sentence hanging in mid-air and Pryor's secretary finished it for her: "Perhaps he would be willing to make an exception in your case. At any rate I shall take the responsibility of asking him."

"Oh, thank you—thank you so much."

With extreme care Miss Walker opened the door of her employer's private office and tiptoed within. A casual observer would have said that Mr. Pryor looked anything but busy as he lay back in his leather upholstered office-chair with his feet resting on his desk and his head pillowed in his clasped hands. But Miss Walker had been Pryor's secretary for several years and she knew that he accomplished his hardest and most profitable work while stretched out horizontally in this undignified position.

"I can always think better with my feet high and my head low," was his explanation for this idiosyncrasy. "That makes it easier for my brain to get the amount of blood it needs for heavy ratiocination."

So quietly did Miss Walker make her entrance into his sanctum that Pryor was not aware of her presence. She waited until a slight movement of his elbows told her that he had reached a momentary pause in his mental concentration, then she cleared her voice and said softly, "I beg your pardon, Mr. Pryor."

"Oh," he said, removing his feet from the desk and blinking like a man who has just awakened from a sound sleep. "It's you, Miss Walker." There was no suggestion of irritation in his tone. On the contrary, his voice was very cordial and friendly.

"I'm very sorry I had to interrupt your thinking, Mr. Pryor. I know you gave orders that you were not to be disturbed under any circumstances. I hope you

will pardon me for disregarding your instructions this time."

"Why, of course, Miss Walker. If you weren't able to do some thinking on your own account, you wouldn't be such an excellent secretary as you are. What is it?"

"A lady is calling to see you personally."

"A lady?" he questioned. "Are you sure she isn't a solicitor of some sort—trying to sell me books or insurance?"

"I'm positive that she isn't a saleswoman."

"Did she give her name or state her business?"

"I didn't find out why she wants to see you, and it wasn't necessary to ask her name."

"Oh, I see. A friend of yours. In that case, of course, I shall be glad—"

"But she isn't a friend of mine," Miss Walker interrupted. "I recognized her because I've seen her in the movies. She is none other than Helen Franklin."

"Not *the* Helen Franklin?"

"In person."

"Then show her in by all means. We mustn't keep her waiting."

As the visitor was ushered in, Pryor rose to greet her.

"How do you do, Mrs. Raymond?" he said. "This is indeed an honor."

"Then you know me?"

"Why, of course. Who doesn't know Helen Franklin, the famous motion picture star and wife of George Raymond, the celebrated director?"

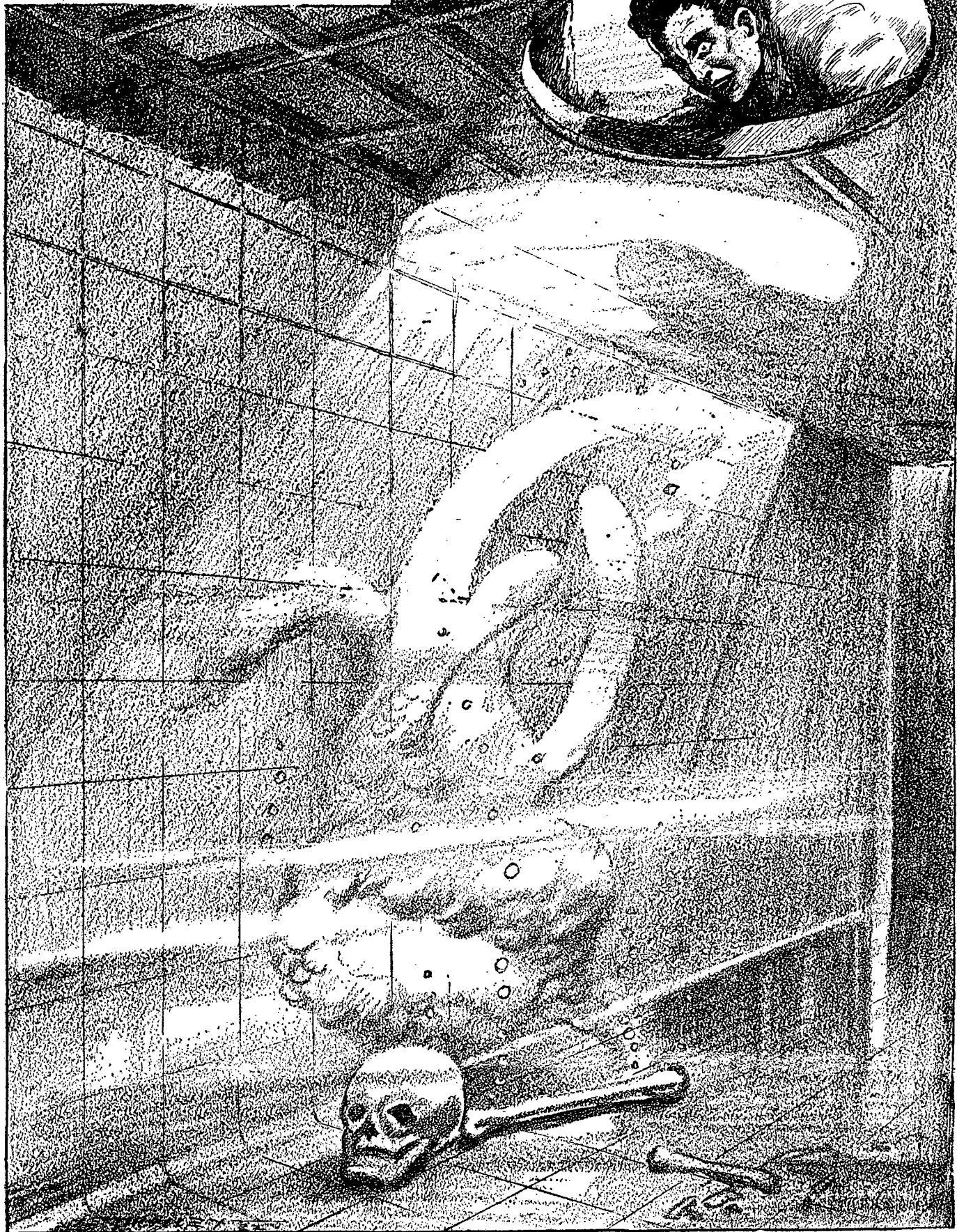
"But I haven't been in the pictures for several years. With so many new and more beautiful faces on the screen nowadays, I thought I had been forgotten long ago."

"I for one can never forget your marvelous-acting," was Pryor's gallant response. "Is it possible that I may be of any service to you?"

"Yes. I am very much in need of help and I have been given to understand that of all the persons in the world, you are best qualified to help me."

"Which covers a lot of territory," Pryor smiled. "I'm afraid whoever gave you that information was either joking with you or grossly flattering me. How did you happen to hear about me?"

At first it looked like the tentacle of an octopus, except that it was the color of unflavored gelatin. It swelled and thickened and forked in a way which no tentacle could duplicate.



"I read about you first in Rob Wagner's *Script*." She opened her handbag and drew forth a clipping which she handed to Pryor.

Though the article was already familiar to him, he read it again.

Under the caption, "Home Town Boy Makes Good," it said, "Jud Pryor, Bevboy, has earned the sobriquet 'Master of Mystery' because of his skill in unraveling crimes that have baffled the police and professional detectives. It is easy to account for Juddy's success as an amateur detective, when we learn that he has been in the advertising business for several years. Having figured out why a firm should advertise in any medium (except the *Script*), he is well qualified to solve any mystery."

Pryor grinned as he handed back the clipping. "Rob is a great humorist. It happens that he and I are both on the Advisory Board of the Beverly Hills Home Owners' Association. He is always kidding me about my attempts at detective work."

"Then you and Mr. Wagner are neighbors?"

"Not exactly neighbors. We both live in Beverly Hills, but his home is north of the car-tracks and mine is south of Wilshire Boulevard. If you know your Beverly Hills you will realize what a tremendous difference that makes. But you said you are in need of help. I assume that it has something to do with your husband's disappearance."

"That's exactly why I came here. You, of course, know all about it."

"On the contrary. Like our other Bevboy, Will Rogers, all I know is what I read in the papers, and I must confess that I haven't even read all the stuff that was printed in the daily press concerning your husband."

"Even if you had read everything that has been published about my husband, you would know less than half the truth."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I am positive my husband has been murdered."

At this startling announcement, Pryor's eyes opened wide with astonishment. "Surely you don't mean that, Mrs. Raymond. Naturally under the circumstances you are overwrought and under severe tension; but don't you think you are unduly pessimistic when you assume that your husband has been murdered?"

"It isn't an assumption on my part but a certainty."

"In that case you should be talking to the District Attorney rather than to me."

"I am not ready for that yet. To my own satisfaction I am certain that my husband has been murdered. But I have no proof—that is, no proof of the sort a District Attorney would consider valid. That is why I need your help, Mr. Pryor."

"You seem to take it for granted that I am a private detective."

"That's the impression I got from the publicity I've read about you. You are a detective, aren't you?"

"Not at all. I'm an advertising and merchandising counsellor. My specialty is commercial research."

"I don't believe I understand."

"Then permit me to explain. I am a doctor for sick businesses. In a certain sense I do detective work—just as any physician does. Before he can prescribe intelligently a doctor must first find out what is wrong with the patient. I have to do the same thing, except that my patients are commercial enterprises instead of

persons. Does that make it clearer to you, madam?"

"Not exactly. I don't pretend to know anything about business. I hope you don't think I'm dumb."

"Of course not. It's my fault if I can't make you comprehend. Perhaps a specific example will serve to make my work clearer to you. You have heard of Yuccatone Hair Tonic, have you not?"

"I've seen it advertised."

"Then you will doubtless recall that instead of being packed in a glass bottle, Yuccatone is sold in a unique vitreous clay container decorated in imitation of Indian pottery. The merchandising plan behind this is two-fold: It ties in with the idea that the Indians of California have for many years used the juices of the yucca plant for cleansing their hair. In addition it gives the advertising man and the salesman something extra to talk about. When the container is empty it can be utilized as a bud-vase or as a receptacle for various small objects."

"A test campaign conducted in San Diego convinced the Yuccatone Company that this idea has a strong appeal to the buying public. Subsequently a large national advertising campaign was inaugurated."

"For a while it was a big success. Then a complaint came in from a dealer in San Francisco who claimed that several of the containers were only partly filled. Without taking time to investigate, the Yuccatone people wired the dealer, authorizing him to replace with fresh stock all containers found to be short measure. This was backed up with a shipment of make-good merchandise. Attributing this trouble to carelessness on the part of someone in the packing department, the manufacturers gave orders to have all future shipments carefully checked before leaving the factory, and dismissed the matter from their minds."

"But it wasn't long before they were flooded with similar complaints from all parts of the country. One big druggist in Phoenix, Arizona, claimed that all he received in his consignment was a gross of empty bottles. It cost the Yuccatone Company over a hundred thousand dollars to replace short-measure stock; and even after they had taken the most careful precautions to insure proper packing the complaints continued to come in."

"It was then that they realized that they needed the help of a business research-expert like myself. I was called in for consultation and I set to work to find out what was wrong. When I tell you what the trouble was you will perhaps wonder why the Yuccatone people didn't find it out for themselves—but that's the way a lot of business men are—they are so close to their own problems that they see only tree trunks instead of the entire forest."

"Then you solved the mystery?" Mrs. Raymond inquired.

"Of course," he said. "I have never yet failed to solve a problem that has been presented to me." Though this sounded egotistical, there was no suggestion of conceit in Pryor's tone as he spoke these words. He was merely stating an indubitable fact.

"I'm curious to know the answer," his visitor said.

"The trouble was in the containers themselves. Through some flaw in the manufacturing process the jars had not been properly glazed. As a result they were slightly porous, just as an olla jar* is. The liquid

* A porous clay jar sometimes used for cooling water by evaporation from the surface.

CHAPTER II

The Director Who Vanished

seeped through the pores and evaporated from the outside of the bottles. Once that was known, the remedy was obvious. Subsequently the containers were purchased from a more reputable pottery concern which could guarantee that the bottles would be absolutely impervious."

"I see what you mean now when you call yourself a doctor for sick businesses," Mrs. Raymond said. "But it seems to me that solving crime calls for exactly the same kind of skill as you have shown in your commercial research work."

"That's what I have been told before. In fact, it was by a similar line of reasoning that I was inveigled into tackling my first murder mystery."

"And you solved it, didn't you?"

"Of course. As I told you before, I have never once failed to complete satisfactorily any task I have undertaken."

"Then I still feel more certain than ever that you are the one best qualified to help me."

"Thank you. But again I must remind you that sleuthing is entirely foreign to my regular work. My past efforts along those lines have been more in the nature of an avocation rather than a vocation. For that reason I can accept only such cases as are unusually difficult."

"That's a singular attitude," Mrs. Raymond said. "I've never heard of anyone going out of his way to tackle a job just because it was difficult."

Pryor laughed. "I suppose it is a rather eccentric vice. You see I happen to be a crank on puzzles. I can get more fun out of solving a cryptogram or a problem in higher mathematics, than from any other form of recreation. And because my attempts as an amateur detective are for amusement only, I cannot consistently spend my time on any case unless it interests me."

"I hope you will find my case interesting," she assured him.

"That all depends on how puzzling it is. If, as you infer, the solution is obvious, I'm afraid I shall not want to bother with it."

"But what makes you think this case is going to be so easy?"

"Your own words."

"Didn't you say that you are sure that your husband was murdered?"

"Yes. And I might add that I know who murdered him. That is, I know in the way that most women know things like this—by my feminine intuition."

"Then you really are not so sure after all?"

"To my own satisfaction, yes; but for any practical purposes, no. To accomplish what I hope to do, it will be necessary to obtain positive proof and I am afraid that is impossible."

"Now you begin to interest me. I have never yet encountered any problem that cannot be solved. That word 'impossible' is a challenge to human intelligence, and I for one am glad to pick up the gauntlet."

"Does that mean that you will take my case? Oh, thank you, Mr. Pryor, thank you so—"

"One moment," he hastened to interpose. "I haven't said I would take your case yet. Whether or not I shall do so depends entirely on how good a puzzle it really is. I'm afraid I am a bit hazy on the details of your husband's disappearance. Would you mind enlightening me?"

"Gladly." And thus Mrs. Raymond told her story:

"IT happened nearly two weeks ago—on Sunday, September 11, to be exact. Together with some other guests, my husband, George Raymond, and I, were attending a house party at Sidney Webber's Malibu Beach cottage."

"Sidney Webber?" Pryor questioned. "He is a motion picture director, too, is he not?"

"Yes. He is connected with the same producing company as my husband—the Ajax Studio in North Hollywood. Webber is the man who murdered George." She made this bold accusation as calmly as if she had said, "It's a fine day today."

If she expected Pryor to ask her why she suspected Webber, she was disappointed. The Master of Mystery waited patiently for her to go on with her story:

"It was a very informal party. The guests did about what they pleased, with very little supervision on the part of our host. We ate our meals whenever we felt like it. Breakfast, especially, was very informal and was served continuously from seven until eleven, according to the habits of the respective guests."

"My husband is an early riser, but I was among those who had breakfast after ten o'clock. George put on his bathing suit and went from our room directly to the swimming pool. He is very fond of swimming and diving, you know, and he prefers to bathe in the plunge rather than in the breakers. I learned afterward that he was joined in the pool by Sidney Webber, who also is a crank on swimming. They were the only ones who went in the plunge that day. Sidney claims that he got a chill and returned to the house only a few minutes after entering the plunge. This left George alone in the pool. That was the last that was seen of him."

She paused for such a long period that Pryor finally said, "Is that all?"

"I'm just giving you the high spots," Mrs. Raymond went on. "Naturally a lot of other things happened before, during and after the murder, but it's hard for me to tell which of these events had any bearing on the case. Perhaps, from what I have told you and from what you have read in the papers, you may wish to ask some questions. If so, fire away."

"Thank you. Several questions have occurred to me. For instance: When did you first discover that your husband had disappeared?"

"Not until after lunch—about two o'clock, I should say."

"And he entered the pool shortly after seven?"

"Yes—at about seven-fifteen."

"In other words, it was nearly seven hours from the time he was last seen by Mr. Webber until his absence was noticed?"

"It may have been even longer than that. I began to look for him at two o'clock, but it was not until night had fallen that I became seriously alarmed."

"I hope you will pardon me, Mrs. Raymond, but it seems rather singular to me that a guest at a house party could have vanished like that for seven hours or more without being missed."

"That's easy to explain. As I told you before, we were accustomed to looking after ourselves. The guests were divided into three or four small groups of kindred

souls, who entertained each other according to their own peculiar tastes. It was a very rare thing for a husband to be in the same group with his wife. I think you can understand the reason for that."

"I'm afraid that is beyond my powers of comprehension." Pryor smiled. "You see, I am a bachelor."

"In that case you couldn't be expected to understand."

"Nevertheless, I am deeply interested. May I ask how you passed away the time between breakfast and luncheon?"

"I was playing volley-ball on the beach in front of Webber's cottage."

"And the other members of your group?"

"My partner was Walter Ransford. Perhaps you have heard of him. He is an architect."

Pryor nodded but did not commit himself. "From what you said, I infer that there were two others in your group of volley-ball enthusiasts."

"Yes. Sally Green and Dick Adams. They didn't belong in Webber's party. We just picked them up on the beach and got them to play with us."

"In that case they probably had nothing to do with Mr. Raymond's disappearance. I don't suppose you know how the other guests were entertaining each other."

"Not much except that I am sure that the four bridge fiends were hard at it playing contract in the garden."

"And the names of these bridge players are?"

"Mrs. Webber, Victor Saconi and Mr. and Mrs. Bernstein."

"Mr. and Mrs. Bernstein?" Pryor repeated. "Both playing bridge? Apparently there was one couple which could enjoy a mutual recreation."

"I can explain that, too. You see, the Bernsteins are both over fifty."

"That makes everything clear, I can assure you," Pryor smiled again. "And now about this Mr. Saconi whom you mentioned as being one of the bridge fiends? Isn't he the husband of Angela Piuma?"

"Yes. Many people refer to him as Mr. Piuma. But they had better not call him that to his face. He is pretty touchy about Angela's career."

"And what about Miss Piuma? Do you know where she was between breakfast and luncheon?"

"I can't answer that question from personal observation, but I can make a shrewd guess. Undoubtedly she was in some out-of-the-way corner with Sidney Webber." There was no mistaking the cattish implication, but Pryor pretended not to notice it.

"That gives us a rough sketch of our cast of characters," he said. "And now for the setting. As I understand it, at the time your husband was last seen he was swimming in Mr. Webber's plunge. I assume that this swimming pool is out of doors."

"There is no roof over it, if that's what you mean. But it is surrounded by a high cement wall."

"How high would you say the wall is—five feet or so?"

"Much more than that. I'm not very good at estimating distances, but I should say it is at least ten feet high."

"Is it too high for a man to reach with his fingertips?"

"Much too high for that. He would have to be an exceptional athlete to reach it with his fingertips even if he jumped up as high as he could."

"Isn't that a rather unusual way to enclose a swimming pool?"

"Not in the motion picture colony. Malibu Beach is

infested with rubbernecks. The only way we can get any privacy is by building walls that folks can't look over when they stand on top of their automobiles."

"I see. But of course there are doors in the wall."

"Only one, and that opens on the patio between the plunge and the house. It would have been impossible for George to leave the swimming pool without being seen."

"How can you be so sure of that?"

"Because the table, where the bridge players were sitting all morning, was only a few feet from the entrance of the pool. In order to walk from the plunge to the house George would have had to pass within a few inches of them. At least one of them would have been sure to have seen him."

"Then you don't think there is any possibility that your husband staged the disappearance himself?"

"Just what do you mean by that?"

"Nothing personal, I assure you. I hope you will pardon me for suggesting it, but such things are by no means unknown. There have been innumerable cases in which a person for one reason or another decided to vanish for a while. Isn't there a bare possibility that Mr. Raymond might have done something of that sort?"

"If he did he certainly picked a poor time to stage his disappearance. In the first place he was wearing only a bathing suit. He couldn't have had any money on his person, although I found several hundred dollars in the pockets of the clothes he left behind. Furthermore there is no reason, that I know of, why he would want to disappear, but there were many reasons why he would do everything in his power to stay. He is right in the midst of producing the greatest picture he has ever undertaken. If he had finished it I am certain he would have become even more famous than he was before. As it is, the picture will probably be completed by Sidney Webber, his worst rival."

"Am I to infer that your husband and Mr. Webber were not on good terms?"

"Oh they never had any open fights, if that's what you mean. But you can bet that there was no love lost between them."

"I see. From what you say, I think we can safely discard the theory that he disappeared of his own accord. Another possible assumption is that he was abducted against his will."

"Why should anybody want to abduct him?"

"The most common reason in such a case is to obtain ransom money."

"But if he had been taken by kidnappers they would have made their demands known by this time. Besides, I can't see how any man or gang of men could have abducted George without being seen. Remember it was a Sunday and there were hundreds of people on the beach. There were at least four persons within a few feet of the plunge. Even if he had been taken by surprise and had been prevented from calling for help, he would have put up a fight and there would have been some sounds of a struggle. The four bridge players all said that they neither heard nor saw anything suspicious."

"Then you feel certain that he could not have been abducted?"

"Absolutely certain. He was murdered, I tell you."

"But if he did not leave the plunge of his own account and if he was not taken away forcibly, he must have been killed in the pool."

"Either in the pool or on the deck that surrounds it."

"In that case it would be necessary for the murderer to get rid of the body. I take it for granted that no body was found."

"Not the slightest trace of his body was found—not even a button from his bathing suit."

"Hum!" Pryor closed his eyes and started rubbing his nose with his thumb and index finger. After a few moments of reflection he exclaimed, "By Jupiter, this is a mystery!"

"I'll say it is!" Mrs. Raymond agreed.

His next remark astonished her. It was, "I have decided to take the case."

"What?" she exclaimed. "You have decided to take the case? I thought you had been on it for half an hour already."

"Not at all," he assured her. "With your leave I shall start to-morrow morning at nine o'clock. In the meantime I must dictate a report on my last case, which I thought out a few minutes before you arrived, so I trust you will excuse me."

"Very well. Would you like me to come back here or will you be good enough to come to my home?"

"Neither," he said. "My first task is to look over the scene of the—well I suppose I may as well call it a crime. I assume that you can arrange for me to do that?"

"I think so. You don't mind my coming along do you?"

"On the contrary. Your assistance will not only be welcome but almost essential."

"Then suppose you give me your Beverly Hills address and I'll have my chauffeur call for you tomorrow morning at nine. I live in Windsor Square so it will be right on the way to Malibu."

CHAPTER III

On the Road to Malibu

SHORTLY after nine on the following morning Mrs. Raymond's limousine pulled up in front of Pryor's modest bungalow.

As they rolled over the winding pavements of Beverly Boulevard, Mrs. Raymond said, "By the way, Mr. Pryor, as you probably know, it will take us more than half an hour to get to Malibu. Perhaps you would like to make use of the time by asking me some more questions. That is, unless you prefer to wait until we get to Mr. Webber's cottage."

"There's no time like the present," was Pryor's response. "If you don't mind I *would* like to ask you some questions."

"Go right ahead. I shall be glad to tell you all I know."

"First let me dispose of the purely routine questions. Assuming that this is a case of murder, one of the first things a conventional detective would want to know is, who will profit most by the death of the victim?"

"I have already hinted the answer to that question. Sidney Webber has always been jealous of my husband's success. Doubtless you know that the capitalists who are financing the Ajax Company have insisted on a drastic program of economy. Not only have they ordered substantial decreases in salaries, but also a reduction in the number of executives on the payroll. It won't be long before the axe starts lopping off heads, and Webber

was one of the people slated for early decapitation."

"Pardon me, please," Pryor interrupted. "In order to handle a matter in a systematic and orderly manner, suppose we start with the person or persons, if any, who would profit financially from Mr. Raymond's death."

"You mean by inheritance?"

"Yes. I infer that Mr. Raymond owned a considerable amount of property. Do you know whether or not he left a will?"

"Why yes. Except for a few minor bequests, he willed all his property to me."

"I see. He carried life insurance, of course."

"Indeed he did. In fact his life insurance represents by far the greater part of his estate. He had no appreciable securities and very little cash in the bank. Our home is heavily mortgaged."

"Would you mind telling me the amount of the insurance?"

"Not at all. It is two hundred thousand dollars. I may as well be frank and tell you that one reason why I want George's death cleared up is so that I can collect this insurance. As matters stand now there is little chance for me to get what is rightfully due me. I am heavily in debt and, if I don't get that money soon, I'm afraid I shall have to give up my home and my car and live on the charity of my friends."

"I see. But if it should transpire that your husband is still alive you will of course be able to continue living in the same style as heretofore."

"Why yes—that is providing George retains his position. Why do you ask such questions as this? Surely you don't suspect that I murdered my husband, do you?"

Pryor did not even smile as he replied, "There are two ways to solve a murder. One is to suspect everybody who is in any way connected with the crime and then to eliminate them one by one. The other is not to suspect anybody until sufficient evidence has accrued to make the suspicion valid."

"And which method do you intend to use in this case?"

"I'm not entirely certain yet. But I am inclined to favor the method of universal suspicion."

"From that I take it that you have already begun to suspect me."

"I'll be frank with you, just as you have been with me, and tell you that the answer to that is 'Yes and no!'"

Mrs. Raymond laughed. "I must give you credit for being honest and independent. And if you don't mind my being equally blunt, I might add that you are a bit ridiculous."

"What makes you think that?"

"If I were a murderer I would hardly be likely to engage such a clever man as you to solve the murder."

"I suppose that does sound ridiculous. Nevertheless it is precisely what happened in the first murder mystery I tackled. The man who committed the murder was the one who induced me to handle the case. He thought his puzzle had been devised so cleverly that even I could not solve it. It may interest you to know that at the present moment he is behind the bars at San Quentin prison."

"Are you telling me this to frighten me?"

"Of course not. I merely want you to understand clearly in advance exactly how I work. So if you did murder your husband, my advice to you is to tell your chauffeur to drive me back home right now, and I shall promise to reveal no word of what you have told me."

Mrs. Raymond turned so that she could look him straight in the eye. Then she said, "I believe you really mean that."

"I certainly do. Shall we turn back?"

"Not yet. But I am beginning to understand why those who know you well call you the Master of Mystery."

By this time they were dipping down into a lovely canyon studded with sprawling sycamore trees, and the grey waters of the Pacific lay before them. The car swung out on the broad pavement that skirted the ocean and purred evenly on its northward journey.

After several minutes of silence, Mrs. Raymond said, "Aren't there any more questions you would like to ask?"

"Are you sure you don't object to answering my questions?" he parried.

"Not at all. I enjoy it. Please ask me some more."

"Very well then. Suppose we get a line on the characters of our plot. Let us start with the young man with whom you were playing volley-ball."

"How do you know he is a young man?"

"Merely intuition. Women do not have a monopoly on that word you know. He is young, is he not?"

"Comparative. His age is twenty-seven."

"Well educated?"

"Very. He's a University graduate and a real scholar."

"Does he know anything about law?"

"What a singular question! The answer is 'yes'. He studied law for two years but was never admitted to the bar. That was because he became interested in architecture and dropped his law studies."

"Do you happen to know whether or not he is interested in science?"

"I believe he is. He often talks about chemistry, biology and similar subjects."

"Then you have talked with him a great deal."

"We have been friends for several years."

"I hope you will not be offended if I ask you if there is anything more than friendship in his association with you."

"Since I don't think you mean any offence I don't intend to become offended no matter what you ask. My reply to this question is that Walter Ransford is desperately in love with me."

"And you?" Pryor went on inexorably.

"Ever since I have been married I have been the most prudent and dutiful of wives. I think you can understand that during my career as a motion picture star I had many suitors. So far George Raymond is the only man who has won my love. Does that answer your question?"

"Admirably. And I might add that it corroborates my—shall I use that word 'intuition' again?"

"Thank you. Do you want to know anything more about Walter?"

"Not for the present. Suppose we pass on to the Bernsteins. From what you have already told me I infer that they are devoted to each other."

"I don't know that I would use the term devoted exactly. If you could hear the way they razz each other when they hold their post-mortem examinations over defunct bridge hands, you would hardly call them that. But they don't meddle in other people's business, and that's something."

"I see. For the time being we can pass them by. Who were the other two bridge players?"

"Mrs. Webber and Victor Saconi."

"I don't suppose Mrs. Webber knows anything about law or science, does she?"

"Lord no! The nearest she comes to being intellectual is in reading the magazine, *Ballyhoo*."

"And how about Saconi. Isn't he a doctor of some sort?"

"I believe he was such in Italy. But he hasn't been practicing medicine since he came to Hollywood, I am sure of that."

"Do you know whether he is familiar with legal procedure?"

"Not for certain. But I wouldn't be surprised if he knows a lot about law. He seems to be well up on all sorts of subjects."

"As I recall it, Saconi is very well known among scientific men—especially in Italy. There has been a lot of talk about him in the newspapers. The general inference seems to be that he was all broken up when his wife left him to come to Hollywood. It was only after she had been here for over a year that he consented to come here too. Am I right about that?"

"Partly. Saconi came here of his own accord after he had tried repeatedly without success to induce Angela to return to him in Italy. I don't think anybody urged him to come here—least of all his wife."

"But they are living together now, are they not?"

"For the sake of appearances they could hardly do otherwise."

"How did she happen to come here in the first place?"

"Haven't you heard? She was 'discovered' by our friend, Sidney Webber. You know what that means of course."

Pryor didn't, but he nodded nevertheless.

"I don't suppose Angela Piuma is interested in either law or science?"

"I should say not. The only thing she is interested in is Angela Piuma."

"I see," said Pryor, "and that brings us to the arch villain of the piece, Mr. Sidney Webber. You have jumped at the conclusion that he murdered your husband. Will you please tell me why?"

"For a long time I have waited for you to ask me that question. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to answer it. Webber murdered George because he is jealous of him and because he knows that his own job is safer when George is out of the way."

"No doubt it is true, as you suggest, that Webber was jealous of your husband. But don't you think it is rather far-fetched to regard that as a motive for murder?"

"Not to anyone who knows Webber as I do. He has a terrible disposition. He is forever imagining that people are trying to harm him. He loves to nurse his injuries, whether they are real or imaginary, and to brood over them. He is cruel, unscrupulous and madly ambitious. He would stop at nothing. He would destroy anything that stood in his way."

"You don't seem to like him very much, do you?"

"I hate him—and for good reason. It was he who ruined my career in motion pictures. If it wasn't for his wife, who is as sweet as he is bitter, I never would have gone near his home."

"I see. Do you happen to know whether Mr. Webber is a law student or a scientist?"

"If he has any tendencies in those directions he cer-

CHAPTER IV

A Rival Sleuth

tainly has succeeded in concealing them. His education—if he had any at all—must have been very limited. Of course he has a certain amount of ability along lines of showmanship or he wouldn't have been able to hang on to his job as long as this. But I'm sure that he knows little or nothing about either law or science."

"How about yourself, Mrs. Raymond? I don't suppose you are interested in science are you?"

"Not so you would notice it."

"And how about law? For instance, do you happen to know the meaning of the legal term, *corpus delicti*?"

"Heavens no. From the sound of it I would guess that it means 'delicious body'. Maybe it is a highfaluting word for Follies beauty. Did I guess right?"

Pryor laughed.

"Not quite. Like the radio announcer who thought he was a wit, you are exactly half right."

"Then what does it mean?"

"We'll come to that later."

"Ah," she joked. "The Master of Mystery is again waxing mysterious."

"I have to do something to keep up the bluff."

"That sounds modest, but it isn't necessary for a man of your ability to bluff."

"Don't be so sure of that. I have already begun to wonder how I am going to bluff through the next hour or two."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm thinking about our visit to Webber's cottage. Hasn't it occurred to you that you will have to give some explanation for my visit?"

"Golly! I never thought of that. I can't very well tell Mrs. Webber that I brought you to her home in the hope of proving that her husband is a murderer, can I?"

"Hardly."

"I don't think Emily Post would ever condone such a breach of etiquette."

"Then what shall I tell her?"

"My suggestion is that you tell her I am an investigator for the Insurance Company. That isn't exactly a lie because one of my clients happens to be an insurance company. If you tell her that, I shall be able to nose around and ask impertinent questions without exciting suspicion."

"How does that idea appeal to you."

"Splendid! I see now what you meant when you intimated that it is sometimes necessary for you to put up a bluff."

By this time they had reached the strongly constructed fence which marked the easterly confines of Malibu Beach. The houses of the colony were of many different sizes and styles and were stretched out in a long line, so close together that there seemed to be scarcely room enough for a person to walk between them. They all faced toward the ocean. Between them and the staunch wire fence bordering the road was a wide stretch of vacant, sandy land. The only break in the fence was an unpretentious archway over which hung a sign reading "Private Property." This entrance could be closed and locked but the gateway was open at that particular time.

The car swung off the highway and bumped along the road of decomposed granite between the gate and the line of houses. It pulled up alongside a high concrete or cemented wall, which Pryor surmised was the boundary of Sidney Webber's swimming pool.

SIDNEY WEBBER was not at home, but his wife received the visitors very cordially. If she had any suspicions of Pryor's mission she concealed them successfully.

"I can't tell you how much I sympathize with you, my dear," she told Mrs. Raymond. "I do hope nothing serious has happened to George."

"Thank you Rose. I know I can depend on you. But I'm afraid I shall never see George again."

"Then you think——"

"I hardly know what to think. This suspense is driving me mad."

Pryor couldn't help but notice the marked difference in the mournful tone which she used in talking with Mrs. Webber, as contrasted with the light, bantering air which had characterized her conversations with him.

"Mr. Pryor would like to take a look at the swimming pool," Mrs. Raymond went on. "You don't mind do you?"

"Of course not, my dear. And, by the way, there is a police officer out there now."

"A police officer?" Mrs. Raymond exclaimed.

"Well not exactly. I suppose he is some sort of detective. He said he was from the sheriff's office."

Mrs. Raymond flashed a meaning wink at Pryor but said nothing.

The man, whom they found at the swimming pool, looked more like a plumber on a holiday than a detective.

Mrs. Webber tried to perform the functions of presentation, but she had to ask both of the men for their names before she could make them acquainted with each other.

"My name is James Dillon," said the deputy sheriff as he threw back his coat and exposed a silver badge pinned to his vest.

"And mine is Pryor. Here is my card."

Consumed with curiosity, Mrs. Raymond glanced over Dillon's shoulder and read this inscription on the bit of pasteboard he held in his hand:

"JUSTIN HUNTLEY PRYOR

**Special Investigator for the
International Insurance Institute."**

Later on when she asked Pryor about this concern, he confessed that it was a fictitious name invented by him for use while doing research work for his client, the insurance company. The purpose of the card was to set up a bogus authority for Pryor to do his investigating.

"Have you found any clues yet, Inspector?" he asked Dillon.

"Maybe I have and maybe I haven't" was the deputy's cryptic reply. "I got a theory; but I ain't telling nobody about it yet." With that he turned his back on Pryor and began examining the cement wall with a large magnifying glass.

Thus snubbed, Pryor said in a low tone to Mrs. Webber, "Perhaps I had better wait until your local Sherlock Holmes has completed his inspection of the pool. In the meantime there are a few details I would like to clear up. I believe you were one of the foursome who were playing bridge on the patio on the day Mr.

Raymond disappeared were you not, Mrs. Webber?"

"Yes, I was, Mr. Taylor."

"Pryor is my name," he corrected her. "I wonder if you will be good enough to answer a question or two?"

"I'd be delighted!" Her voice sounded as if she were looking forward to a thrilling experience.

"Thank you. Will you please show me where your bridge table was located?"

Mrs. Raymond said, "If you two will excuse me, I'll have a word with Mr. Dillon. Perhaps I can give him some clues on which to exercise his analytical powers."

Mrs. Webber led Pryor to the patio.

"This is where we were playing when that terrible thing happened," she said pointing to a table with wrought iron legs. Shaded by a large beach umbrella, it was only a few feet from the entrance to the swimming pool.

"Will you kindly tell me where you were sitting?"

"Here," she said as she sat down in the chair which faced the walk leading to the house.

"And Mr. Saconi. I suppose he was your partner?"

"No. I was playing with Mr. Bernstein. Mrs. Bernstein sat here and Mr. Saconi here." The last seat she indicated was the one facing toward the house.

Pryor sat down with his back to the swimming pool, in the chair which had been occupied by Saconi, and went on with his questioning.

"You started your game rather early in the morning did you not?"

"Yes. It was shortly after breakfast."

"Then you all saw Mr. Webber and Mr. Raymond enter the plunge?"

"Not all of us. I was here alone when they went into the pool."

"But the others arrived shortly afterward?"

"Yes. I always have breakfast early. The Bernsteins and I had made arrangements the night before to play bridge in the morning and we had invited Mr. Saconi to make the fourth. He is our next door neighbor, you know."

"I see. Then Mr. Saconi was not a member of your house party?"

"Why yes. Both he and his wife, Angela Piuma, were in the party, except that they spent the night in their own home. This is just a summer cottage you understand, and our sleeping quarters are somewhat limited. On account of Miss Piuma and her husband living right next door—"

Pryor interrupted her garrulous chattering with a polite, "Thank you, Mrs. Webber. I understand perfectly. Were Mr. Raymond and your husband together when they entered the plunge?"

"Yes. They were both very fond of swimming you know. They often go bathing together and there is a sort of—"

"I see. And did they seem to be on good terms that morning?"

"Oh yes, indeed. Of course both my husband and Mr. Raymond are somewhat temperamental. They are always getting into arguments, but there never was anything serious behind their quarrels I can assure you."

"May I ask what you were doing at the time they passed by here on the way to the plunge?"

"I was playing solitaire."

"And the other three bridge players arrived before your husband left the pool?"

"Yes. They—"

"And you were all playing here for an hour or more?"

"For at least five hours I should say. We are all very fond of bridge you know."

"So it seems. And the four of you were there together all during that time?"

"Yes. We—"

"And didn't any of you notice that Mr. Raymond was staying in the pool unusually long?"

"No. As a matter of fact, we all thought that both men left the pool soon after we started playing."

"Then you are not certain but that Mr. Raymond *did* leave the plunge, while you were playing here?"

"At first we were not sure. But afterward when we began to check up we found out that none of us had seen Mr. Raymond leave."

"I hope you will pardon me for saying so, but I don't see how that could happen."

"One thing that was confusing was that Mr. Webber was wearing Mr. Raymond's bathrobe when he went to the house. It was a very gaudy robe—lavender with green stripes. Everyone knew Mr. Raymond by that bathrobe and they were always kidding him about it."

"I see. But how did your husband happen to be wearing it? He explained that of course?"

"Yes. He hadn't been in the water very long before he began to get a chill. Mr. Raymond noticed that his lips were getting blue, so he told Sidney he had better go back to the house. Sidney didn't have his bathrobe with him, you understand, so Mr. Raymond insisted on him wearing his. That was probably the reason why Mr. Bernstein thought he saw George go back to the house."

"But you, of course knew it was your husband?"

"Of course. It would take more than a green and lavender bathrobe to disguise those legs of his."

"And I suppose you were so absorbed in the bridge game that you didn't notice how long Mr. Raymond was staying in the pool."

"That was partly the reason. But I also thought he had gone back to dress while I was in the house, telling the cook what to serve for lunch."

"Then you were *not* sitting at the card table during all those five hours? Does that mean that you stopped playing for a while and then started again later?"

"No. We kept on playing all the time. I left for only a few minutes while I was dummy."

"Did any of the others leave the table during the game?"

"I think so. In fact I'm sure that all four of us got up and left at least once during the game."

"You mean separately of course?"

"Of course."

"Did you hear Mr. Raymond call out or make any other noise while he was in the pool alone?"

"He didn't call out. But I heard a lot of splashing. Mr. Raymond was very fond of diving, you know. He often—"

"I see. And were all the splashes about the same? I mean did they all sound like the noise made when a diver hits the water?"

"Most of them did. Once I heard him making a great commotion, as if he was splashing his arms and legs in the water at the same time. After that I heard no more splashes."

And are you sure he didn't call out? Did you by any

chance ask the other three if they heard any suspicious sounds."

"Yes, indeed. We talked it over and checked with each other. The stories Mr. Saconi and the Bernsteins told were substantially the same as mine."

"I don't suppose you saw any strangers in this vicinity that day, did you?"

"Not that I can remember."

"And there were no blimps or airplanes flying overhead?"

"I'm sure there were no airships anywhere near here. If there had been we would have noticed them and spoken about them."

"Undoubtedly. And if anybody had tried to scale the wall of the pool or had climbed up on the roof of the garage, one of your party would have seen him without doubt."

"I don't see how anyone could have done either of those things without being seen."

"Thank you. There are just two more questions I would like to ask. Your husband doesn't happen to be a student of law does he?"

"Of course not. Why do you ask that question?"

Pryor laughed good naturedly, and then said, "Please pardon me Mrs. Webber, but I am not supposed to answer questions. My job is to ask them. And the next one is this: Is your husband interested in science?"

"Science?" She asked with a bewildered look on her face. "Do you mean Christian Science?"

"Not exactly. His religion doesn't matter. What I'd like to know is whether he has ever done any work in chemistry, in biology or in any science of that sort."

"Oh, now I see what you mean. I've never heard Sidney say anything about chemistry or biology. He is too busy with his directing to bother with anything like that."

"Thank you, Mrs. Webber. You have given me a great deal of help and I appreciate your courtesy very much. I wonder if Mr. Dillon is through with the swimming pool. If you'll excuse me I'll go and see."

As he stepped within the high walls of the plunge he saw Mrs. Raymond and Dillon still standing where he had left them. They seemed to be engaged in earnest conversation.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "Don't let me interrupt you. I'll be back later." He started to walk away, but Mrs. Raymond called to him.

"We're through with our confab now, Mr. Pryor. Perhaps you and Inspector Dillon would like to talk things over."

"I'm not an Inspector," Dillon corrected her. "Just a deputy sheriff."

"But I can easily see that you have had a lot of experience as a detective," was Pryor's diplomatic response.

When the Master of Mystery wanted to make friends with a person he usually succeeded, and Dillon proved to be no exception. Knowing that he was likely to be handicapped because of his unauthoritative status, Pryor realized that an alliance with a man who had the law behind him, might be extremely useful. Consequently he determined to ingratiate himself with Deputy Sheriff Dillon. In this he quickly succeeded, for Mrs. Raymond had already paved the way for him. Dillon's former coolness had changed into warm cordiality.

"Miss Franklin has been telling me about you, Mr. Pryor. I'm sure pleased to make the acquaintance of the Master of Mystery," and Dillon put out his hand.

Pryor took it and pressed it firmly, as he said, "The pleasure is mutual. I'll bet you are no slouch yourself when it comes to solving mysteries."

"Well I don't exactly believe in blowing my own horn, but I'll say this much: They ain't many criminals that can slip anything over on me."

"I'm sure they couldn't," said Pryor solemnly. "Why can't you and I work together? Mrs. Raymond has probably told you that I am concerned only with the insurance angle of this case. I'm not interested in putting kidnappers or murderers in jail. All I want to do is to find out whether Mr. Raymond is dead or alive. During my investigations I may run into some clues that will help you track down a criminal. If so, I shall be glad to have you get all the credit for making the arrest. On the other hand you may run into some information that will help me with my investigation. What do you say?"

"That sounds good to me. Shake on it." And for the second time he reached out a hairy fist for Pryor to grasp.

Mrs. Raymond took all this in with an amused smile on her face.

"I guess you two sleuths can get along for a while without me," she said. "If you'll excuse me I'll join Mrs. Webber. I have a lot of things to talk over with her. When you finish, Mr. Pryor, please come to the door of the library that opens on the patio. We'll be just inside and we'll be sure to see you."

CHAPTER V

The Mysterious Plunge

LEFT alone with Dillon, Pryor said, "How does it look to you?"

"Mighty bad," said the deputy, shaking his head gravely. "I got several theories, but I ain't proved none of them yet."

"Would you mind telling me about your theories? Perhaps I may be able to help you pick the best one out of the lot?"

"Well, I'll tell you. The first theory I have is that Mr. Raymond just sneaked away and hid out somewhere so his wife could collect his life insurance."

"But, if he had planned to defraud the insurance company, don't you think he would have taken precautions to make it look certain that he was dead? To do that he would have to leave a corpse that would be mistaken for his. Otherwise, according to the California law, his wife would have to wait for seven years, keeping up the premiums on the policy, until she could have her husband declared legally dead by court action."

"By golly! That's right! Never thought of that! I guess that theory ain't much good, is it?"

"I'm afraid not."

"But I have some other theories that will beat that one."

"For instance?"

"Mr. Raymond might of been kidnapped."

"Why?"

"To get ransom money, of course."

"But in that case his wife, or the studio he works for, would have surely heard from the abductors by this time."

"Maybe so and maybe not. Some of these crooks are mighty slick. They wait until the excitement blows over before they start trying to collect."

"That may be a possibility. When a man disappears without any apparent reason, abduction is naturally the first thing one thinks about. I suppose you know that there were crowds of people around here on the Sunday Mr. Raymond disappeared. None of them noticed any strange persons or strange automobiles. There weren't even any airplanes or blimps in this neighborhood on that particular day. Have you any other theories?"

"Sure. After the talk I had with Helen Franklin, I began to suspect that her husband was murdered."

"So she told you that too, did she? I suppose she also gave you the name of his murderer—Sidney Webber."

"That's right. He sure looks suspicious to me."

"Suppose we assume that George Raymond was murdered. What do you think happened to his body?"

"It's probably hidden around here some place."

"Have you found any indications—any traces of the body or signs of a struggle?"

"Can't say that I have. But I'll find that body if it can be found—you wait and see if I don't."

"I certainly hope you do. In the meantime, suppose we take another look around. You have examined all the walls and the pavement of the deck I suppose."

"Sure I have. I thought maybe they might be some secret trap door or passageway, but I ain't found none yet."

Pryor walked around the pool, glancing casually at the walls and deck. Had there been any opening in the cement work it would have been easily discernible.

"It certainly doesn't look like there are any trap-doors or secret passageways here," Pryor agreed. "How about the tank itself?"

The pool was lined with white tile. So far as Pryor could ascertain from a cursory inspection, none of the tiles had been disturbed since the plunge was built. Two things, however, he did notice and he remarked about them to Dillon:

"Doesn't it strike you that this plunge is rather shallow? As I understand it, Mr. Webber is fond of swimming and diving, yet there isn't a part of the pool where the water would be over his head. Even under the springboard it can't be more than five feet deep."

"Lots of these private pools are shallow like that," Dillon informed him. "I suppose that is so they will not be so dangerous for women and children."

"Perhaps so. But there's another thing that looks peculiar to me. You seem to be familiar with swimming pools. Isn't that outlet rather large for a plunge this size?"

He pointed to a grated opening at the bottom of the pool's north wall, where the water was deepest.

"Oh, I don't know," Dillon said. "There's a lot of variation in outlets. That looks O. K. to me."

"Well I guess that's all there is to be seen in here. Shall we take a look outside?"

"Just a minute," Dillon drawled. "I want to get a sample of this water. I got another theory." He took from his hip pocket a flat pint bottle that looked as if it had at one time been used as a container for fluid more powerful than water, and filled it from the pool.

This amused Pryor immensely. "I suppose you are going to have the water analyzed. What do you expect to find in it?"

"Acid," the deputy declared solemnly. "I read a story once about a man that murdered his wife and got

rid of her body by soaking it in a bath-tub full of acid. When she was all dissolved, he just pulled the plug and flooie—out his wife went into the sewer!"

"I see," Pryor responded. "Then you think there is a possibility that Raymond's body was disposed of in the same way?"

"Sure! Why not? I'll know better when I get a chemical analysis of this water."

"But you know of course that in order to dissolve a human body the acid would have to be pretty strong?"

"What of it?"

"And I suppose you know that Mr. Webber was swimming in the pool with Mr. Raymond just before he disappeared?"

"Sure."

"And you know that it would take several thousand gallons of concentrated sulphuric acid to fill this pool with a liquid strong enough to dissolve Mr. Raymond's body?"

"Well I haven't exactly figured that out, but——"

"Suppose we assume that Mr. Webber filled his tank with strong oil of vitriol. Where would he be able to procure so much acid and how would he convey it into the plunge?"

"As I told you before, I haven't had time to figure that out yet. Maybe that acid theory ain't so hot after all," and Dillon emptied his flask back into the pool. "I don't suppose you have any theories, have you?"

Pryor laughed. "I'm afraid not. I don't usually start formulating theories, until I have given a great deal of thought to a problem. Of course you understand that my way of doing things may not be the best way. Yours may be far better than mine."

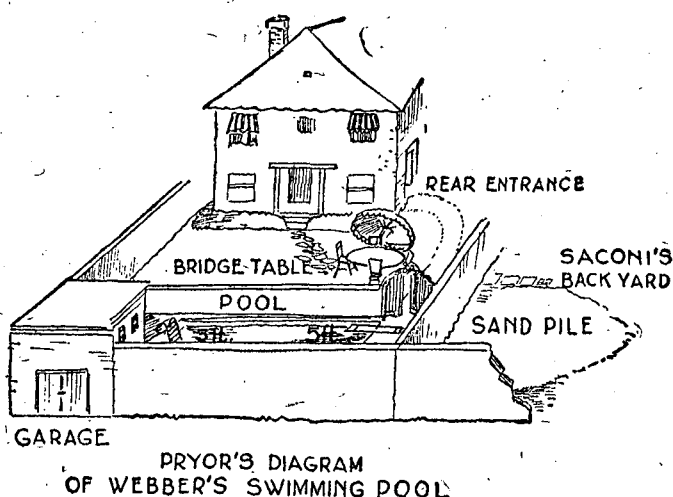
"Not necessarily," Dillon said modestly. "Everybody can work best in their own way."

Pryor took a piece of paper and pencil from his pocket and began making notes.

"Mind telling me what you are doing?" Dillon asked.

"Not at all. I am making a rough sketch of the premises. It will help me visualize the locale when I am doing my thinking."

To get additional details for his sketch, Pryor walked completely around Webber's house, noting the lay of the land on both sides of it. When it was completed his sketch looked something like this:



CHAPTER V

Motives and Suspicions

AS they drove back to the city, Pryor and Mrs. Raymond resumed their discussion of the case.

"How does it look to you, now that you have been on the spot?"

"I'm really not ready to formulate a definite theory yet. I'll say this much, though: It does look as if the possibility of abduction or voluntary disappearance of your husband is almost untenable."

"Then you agree with me that it must be a case of murder?"

"I wouldn't use such a strong term as 'must'. There is still another possibility, you know."

"You mean?"

"Accident."

"Accident? I don't see how in the world George could have met with an accident that would have made him vanish completely."

"Neither do I. But to be systematic we must consider every conceivable contingency. As a matter of fact we haven't conclusively disproved the abduction theory yet, although I must admit that it seems extremely improbable."

"I'll say it is improbable. Suppose we make believe that all these other suppositions are not only improbable but impossible. Suppose we assume that George was murdered. Don't you think that the evidence against Sidney Webber is pretty strong?"

"I'd like to accommodate you, Mrs. Raymond; but I'm afraid I cannot fit Mr. Webber's picture into this particular jig-saw puzzle."

"Why not? He is the only one, I know of, who has a motive for killing George and the temperament for committing murder. Can't you understand that?"

"Once again let me explain to you that when I take a case of this sort I must keep my mind absolutely open. I cannot permit my thinking to be influenced by sentiment. Hence, I can assure you that there is nothing personal in my suggestion that there are at least two other persons whom I know about who *might* have strong motives for doing away with George Raymond."

"I suppose you would include me as one of the two."

"To be brutally blunt, I would. But with equal frankness I must add that your picture doesn't fit any better than Mr. Webber's does."

"I'm glad that you at least don't think any worse of me than you do of Sidney Webber. May I ask why I am thus favored?"

"Because you are too clever to make such a serious mistake."

"Thank you. But I'm still in the dark."

"I'm thinking about what you jokingly referred to as the 'delicious body'—the *corpus delicti*. I suspect that you really know more than you pretended to about that term. Nevertheless I shall elucidate: *Corpus delicti* is Latin for 'body of crime.' In law this means a fundamental proof of a crime, which in the case of a murder necessitates the production of the body itself. One of the basic principles of law is that a person cannot be found guilty of murder unless the body of the murdered person or some part of it has been produced—and it doesn't make a particle of difference how strong the other evidence against an alleged murderer may be."

"That's interesting. But I still fail to see the application to my case."

"According to your own statement, you would be entitled to a substantial amount of insurance if you could prove your husband dead. This might be construed as a cogent motive for murdering him. But a person who was bold enough and clever enough and unscrupulous enough to plan such a crime would hardly be likely to make the mistake of spiriting away the body. To collect insurance without waiting for seven years or more, a corpse must be produced."

"Then you don't think I murdered my husband?"

"The evidence is weak, but I still have you on my list of suspects," Pryor said with a smile, that seemed to belie his words.

"And may I ask who your other suspect is?"

"Again I don't like to express opinions without ample evidence behind them."

"But you have opinions?"

"Yes I have."

"Why don't you tell me? I'm just dying with curiosity."

"From what I have learned so far it looks to me as if there are two likely suspects, to wit, Walter Ransford and Victor Saconi."

"How utterly ridiculous!"

"Perhaps. Nevertheless——"

In a voice that trembled with irritation, she interrupted him: "Why that's absolutely nonsensical. I'll admit that Walter might have a motive—but he's not the murdering kind at all. Why he's so tender-hearted that he wouldn't even swat a fly. As for Victor, he's inclined to be hot-tempered, perhaps, but fundamentally he is very kind-hearted. He'd never do anything like that unless he had a very strong reason—a terribly strong reason—and he couldn't possibly have any reason for harming George."

"Are you sure that Saconi had no possible motive for wanting to do away with your husband?"

"Absolutely none. They have known each other for only a very short time, but they were the best of friends. They never so much as had an argument—much less anything that could have led to murder."

"You are positive of that?"

"Absolutely positive."

"But Saconi has a very attractive wife. Might not that——"

"I see what you are driving at, but I'm telling you that you are barking up the wrong tree. As you can readily guess, I wasn't born yesterday. I've kept a pretty close check on George, ever since we married. He had his faults like most men, but infidelity wasn't one of them. I would stake my life on that. And as for Angela Piuma—she has time for only one person outside of her husband and her little boy."

"And that person is Sidney Webber?"

"Of course. That's a matter of common knowledge. She knows which side her bread is buttered on."

"The plot is rather complicated, isn't it?"

"I'll say it is."

"Angela Piuma and her husband and son live right next door to the Webbers do they not?"

"Yes. A very convenient arrangement don't you think?"

Pryor ignored the insinuation and went on, "Miss Piuma's home looks newer than Webber's."

"It is. Saconi built it after he came here from Italy. Webber sold him the lot you know. When he first located at Malibu Beach, Sidney bought two adjoining lots. He used one of them for a private miniature golf course, until he sold it to Saconi."

"I see. And the Saconi home was designed by Walter Ransford."

"How in the world did you know that?"

"Masculine intuition is at work again. Let me venture another guess: Ransford was also the architect for Webber's place. Am I not right?"

"Weirdly so. Shall I infer that you attach any significance to the fact that Mr. Ransford also designed the swimming pool in which my husband met his death?"

"Not necessarily. Nevertheless what you tell me is immensely interesting. Do you happen to know where Mr. Ransford was during the early part of that day when your husband disappeared?"

"Sure. He was playing volley ball with me. I told you that before."

"That I recall perfectly. But you also told me that you were not an early riser. What I'd like to find out is what Mr. Ransford was doing between the time he awoke from his slumbers and the start of the volley-ball game. Do you happen to know that?"

"Not for certain. But I could make a pretty shrewd guess. He was probably in Angela Piuma's back yard."

"And what would he be doing there?"

"Playing with little Angelo."

"Angelo I suppose is Miss Piuma's five-year-old son."

"Yes. Walter is wild about children. Angelo's nurse usually puts him out in the sand-pile right after his breakfast. Whenever Walter is at Malibu he always makes it a point to spend some time with little Angelo."

"I see. Then you think he was in Saconi's back yard at about the time your husband and Sidney Webber went into the plunge that morning?"

"That's quite likely. Of course you understand that this is mere guesswork on my part. We can easily find out by asking Walter himself."

"Please don't do that. It really doesn't matter. You said your volley ball game lasted about how long?"

"I didn't say. But it was somewhere between twelve and one when we stopped."

"Were you with Mr. Ransford for any length of time after that?"

"No. We both went into the house to dress. We were in our bathing suits, you understand."

"And when did you see him again?"

"About an hour later. We had lunch together."

"I see. Then you couldn't give him a complete *alibi*, could you?"

"*Alibi*? You are not really serious are you? You don't think that Walter Ransford murdered my husband?"

"That question I can answer better if I first have a talk with Mr. Ransford. Do you suppose it can be arranged?"

"It probably can. When would you like to meet him?"

"There's no time like the present. Why not get in touch with him to-day?"

"I don't believe he is in town to-day. He said something about a trip to San Diego. But you can probably catch him at his office tomorrow."

"Would you mind phoning him and making an appointment for say nine-thirty tomorrow morning? If

that is satisfactory, please have him phone my secretary and verify the appointment."

"O. K. Shall I tell him he is one of your favorite suspects?"

"Suit yourself about that. If you really are sure of his innocence, my suggestion is that you merely tell him I would like to get some details concerning the construction of Mr. Webber's swimming pool."

"An excellent suggestion. Believe I'll act on it."

"Which goes to show that you are a very sensible woman."

"Thank you Mr. Master of Mystery. But do you know I hardly know how to take you. Sometimes I think you are trying to kid me. But at other times you frighten me dreadfully."

"I'm sorry. But I must repeat the warning I have already given you. I have never failed to solve any problem I have tackled so far, and I don't intend that this one shall be an exception. On the other hand I haven't gotten far enough into this case to prevent me from withdrawing right now if you so desire. So, unless you are prepared to take the consequences—no matter what the true solution may be, I advise you now to ask me to discontinue my investigation. What do you say—shall I quit or continue?"

Without a moment's hesitation she looked him square in the eye and said: "Please continue, Mr. Pryor. I am depending on you to hew to the line—and let the chips fall where they may."

CHAPTER VI

The Architect and His Microscope

IT was still early in the afternoon when Mrs. Raymond's limousine arrived back in Beverly Hills. Pryor backed his own car out of his garage and headed it toward the Los Angeles Public Library. There he spent several hours browsing around among the well-filled shelves of the science room. Had anyone who didn't know him spied on the Master of Mystery that day he would undoubtedly have concluded that Pryor was scatterbrained and lacking in purpose. Through his hands in rapid succession passed books on chemistry, books on biology, books on bacteriology, books on physiology and books on endocrinology. He took a nibble from one, a chew or two of another and a few swallows from a third, and there seemed to be neither rhyme nor reason to his intellectual diet.

As a matter of fact, however, his reading was done in a very orderly and systematic manner. It was like one of those contests known as "Treasure Hunts" in which the participant follows a trail marked by a series of hidden signs, each of which gives a hint as to where the next clew is to be found.

One of the first landmarks he ran into was the word "phagocyte." From the dictionary he learned that it was derived from the Greek *phagein*, "to eat," and the Greek "*kulos*," a hollow vessel rendered "cyte" in English compound words. The appropriateness of calling this interesting organism an "eating cell" was made clear from the definition, "A leucocyte (white cell) that attacks bacteria or noxious formations, destroying them or rendering them harmless."

Pryor then looked up "leucocyte" and found that the word came from the Greek *leucos*, meaning "white" or

"colorless." A phagocyte, then, is a colorless cell, or "white" blood corpuscle, which can "eat" or destroy bacteria.

Pryor looked up several other definitions. He also made repeated reference to the encyclopedias. But most of the time he spent at the library was devoted to a study of the ductless glands—with particular attention to the pituitary and thyroid glands.

After eating a dinner of fried scallops and *au gratin* potatoes in a café which specialized in sea foods, he went to his office in a downtown business building, and sat for several hours with his feet on his desk and his head resting in a pillow formed by his clasped hands—the old attitude. Several times he picked up the sketch which he had made at Webber's home and scrutinized it minutely. Promptly at ten-thirty, he took his feet off the desk, put on his hat and wended his way homeward.

On the following morning he phoned his office and was informed by Miss Walker, that his appointment with Walter Ransford had been set for nine o'clock.

The young architect turned out to be an unusually attractive young man. He was handsome—almost offensively so from a masculine point of view. Nevertheless there was no suggestion of effeminacy about his wholesome, virile beauty.

His office was not a large one. Its furnishings included the inevitable drawing board, battered roll-top desk and filing cabinets. Tacked all over the walls were pencil sketches of buildings. One piece of equipment seemed rather incongruous for an architect's work-room. It was a microscope of the latest type, which occupied prominent position on a small table near the window.

After Pryor had introduced himself and had shaken hands with Ransford, he remarked, "I hope you will pardon me for making this comment, but I hardly expected to find a microscope in an architect's office."

Ransford smiled pleasantly. "That doesn't really belong in my business paraphernalia. My microscope represents my hobby. It takes the place of the bag of golf clubs you sometimes find tucked away in the closet of a business office. I don't play golf, but a fellow must have some weakness. Mine happens to be microscopy. I suppose you have a hobby also, Mr. Pryor."

"Oh, yes. Yes, indeed. I have a hobby. Mine is solving puzzles. I'm afraid it isn't nearly as interesting or as useful as yours, Mr. Ransford."

"That's purely a matter of taste."

"Precisely. And those who have the best taste select hobbies that enlighten as well as entertain. Since you are interested in microscopy, perhaps you will be able to give me some assistance. I don't suppose you could show me with your microscope what a living phagocyte looks like, when it is digesting a microbe."

"Then you are interested in biology, too?"

"Only as a means of solving a puzzle."

"I think I understand. You asked about living phagocytes, but I'm afraid it would be difficult for me to show you anything like that at such short notice. But I can show you a stain of some white blood corpuscles with ingested bacteria. I also have some live amoebas here. Their movements and methods of feeding are somewhat similar to those of the phagocytes, you know. Perhaps I can get some of my amoebas to perform for you. Would you like to see them?"

"I'd like to very much. But I'm afraid I am imposing on you and taking up too much of your time."

"Not at all. You know what the saying is—or rather what it ought to be—'If your business interferences with your hobby, give up your business.'"

From a shelf he took down a beaker partly filled with water on which a greenish scum floated. He transferred a small portion of this to a microscope slide, added something else, and slipped the strip of glass under the objective of the instrument. With his eye glued to the eyepiece, he made several adjustments. Then he said, "Now if you'll watch for a while you may be lucky enough to see an amoeba attack and digest its prey."

Pryor took off his glasses and placed his left eye to the eye-piece of the microscope.

"Can you see them?" Ransford asked.

"I see several objects. Some of them are small, dark colored specks. The larger objects are transparent and are irregular in form. They seem to be changing their shapes constantly."

"The larger, transparent objects are the amoebas," Ransford informed him. "The name 'amoeba' comes from a word meaning 'to change,' you know. You will notice that parts of the organisms protrude, forming processes or arms. They are called '*pseudopodia*,' or 'false feet.'"

As Pryor watched he saw one of the amoebas reach out and wrap itself around a cluster of the small specks. Within a short time it had engulfed them entirely, yet they could be seen plainly through the transparent substance of the amoeba.

He described this event to Ransford.

"That's the way the amoebas feed," the architect told him. "They have neither mouth nor anus, but they secrete a digestive fluid. This enables them to digest and absorb nutriment at any part of their bodies. When they have removed all the food, they simply unwrap themselves from their victims' remains and move away, leaving the undigested portions behind."

"How do they propel themselves?" Pryor asked. "Do they swim or walk by means of those pseudo—whatever you call them?"

"To a certain extent. But for the most part they propel themselves along by a sort of flowing motion. This is so characteristic that it is called 'amoeboid motion.' The phagocytes you asked me about a moment ago move in the same way."

"I see."

"And, by the way, that reminds me of an interesting experiment I heard about recently. It was originated by a man named Buttschi. He advanced the theory that amoeboid motion is a physical phenomenon, due to alterations in the surface tension. Let me see if I can duplicate Buttschi's experiment."

He took a fresh slide and by means of a pipette transferred a tiny drop of fluid on it.

"We ought to be able to see this even without magnification," Ransford said. "Now watch."

For a second or two no observable change occurred in the drop of liquid. Then it slowly began to move, thrusting out portions of itself which looked exactly like the pseudopodia of the amoebas.

Ransford dropped a speck of dust close to one of the processes. Within a minute or two, the imitation tentacle had wrapped itself around the particle and had drawn it within its substance.

"That must be another kind of organism," Pryor remarked. "It behaves practically the same as an amoeba."

"Nevertheless it is nothing but a drop of oil-soap solution. It will creep around like that for days. Of course, you understand, it cannot digest a microbe as an amoeba can, but so far as its movements are concerned it may well be called an 'artificial amoeba'."

"That's very interesting. It seems to indicate that the amoeba moves blindly until it happens by accident to run into something it can enclose and digest."

"Not at all. Of course the amoeba moves blindly in the sense that it has no sense organs corresponding to the eyes of higher animals. Nevertheless it is guided toward its prey by a force that is equally potent—if not stronger."

"And what is the nature of that force?"

"It is called 'chemotaxis.' Perhaps an illustration will make this clear: When a part of the human body is damaged, as for instance by bacteria, a chemical stimulus is set up which attracts the phagocytes of the blood and causes them to hasten to that particular spot. This is called 'chemotaxis.' Another example that is still more striking is the chemotaxis of the sperm of male fishes toward the eggs laid by the female fishes. I assume that you are familiar with the way fish propagate."

"Reasonably so. The female lays the eggs first, does she not? Then she swims away and the male fish deposits his milt over the eggs and thus fertilizes them. Isn't that correct?"

"Yes. But it is not necessary for the milt to be deposited in contact with the eggs. The eggs themselves have the property of producing this chemical stimulation known as chemotaxis, which impells the spermatozoa of the male to move toward the eggs until they combine with them and fertilize them. In the case of amoeba, anything that it normally uses for food exercises a chemotaxis and attracts the amoeba to it."

"I see. And would you mind answering another question?"

"I shall be glad to. That is if I know the answer."

"I am sure you do. Is there any limit to the size an amoeba can attain?"

"Oh yes. The size of amoebas is decidedly limited. The giant of them all is called pelomyxa. He gets to be as much as three millimeters in length. But the majority of the amoebas are not visible to the naked eye. The smaller forms are about one one-hundredth of a millimeter in diameter."

"Then it wouldn't be possible for an amoeba to grow to be as large, say, as an octopus?"

A startled look came into Ransford's eyes. He gazed at Pryor as if in doubt of his visitor's sanity. But the expression on Pryor's features told him nothing. The Master of Mystery had learned how to assume what gamblers call a "poker face."

"Of course that wouldn't be possible," the architect declared. "An amoeba grows to a certain extent, but soon after it reaches maturity it divides itself into two parts, each of which becomes a complete, new amoeba. That's how they propagate, you know."

"I see. But isn't it possible to make animals or other organisms change their natural functions by artificial means? For instance, it seems to me I read somewhere about a scientist who kept tadpoles in some kind of a solution which prevented them from developing into frogs, but which forced them to grow enormously while still retaining their tadpole form."

"That was probably done with some glandular ex-

tract," said Ransford. "Endocrinology is out of my line. I'm afraid I can't give you any information about that subject."

"Do you know of anyone who could enlighten me?"

"Let me see. There's Doctor Harrower at Glendale, but I believe he is traveling abroad now. Then there's Professor Fellows at Stanford."

"Isn't there anyone here in Southern California who specializes on glands?"

Ransford thought for a moment and then said, "I have it! There is a friend of mine who can probably tell you all you want to know about the use of glandular extracts. He is as crazy about glands as I am about my microscope. But he lives quite a distance from Los Angeles."

"If it isn't more than a hundred miles, I wouldn't mind driving out to his place," said Pryor. "Where is he located?"

"At Malibu Beach. His name is Victor Sacconi."

This unexpected declaration almost caught Pryor off his guard; but his "poker face" again saved him from betraying more than casual interest.

"That's singular," he smiled. "Doesn't Mr. Sacconi live right next door to Sidney Webber's summer home at Malibu?"

"Why yes. Do you know Mr. Webber?"

"Only from what Mrs. Raymond has told me. And that brings me to my purpose in calling on you. I became so interested in your fascinating demonstrations that I almost forgot why I came here. It's about Mr. Webber's swimming pool. You designed it did you not?"

Instantly Mr. Ransford's attitude, which had been very cordial up to this point, changed. In a cold, formal voice he said, "Yes, I drew the plans for Mr. Webber's plunge. What about it?"

"I was out there yesterday," Pryor went on. "And I noticed two things that seemed a bit peculiar to me. You understand, of course, that I know nothing about swimming pools and for that reason my impressions are not worth considering."

"What are the two things you noticed?"

"One was that the water seemed rather shallow, even at the end where the spring-board is. I understand that Mr. Weber is fond of swimming and diving. I should think that he would have preferred a deeper pool."

"What else?" Ransford asked curtly.

"The grated opening at the bottom of the north wall of the tank—I presume that it connects with the outlet pipe for emptying the pool, does it not?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Isn't it rather large for a tank as small as that?"

"Not at all. It's dimensions are just right for permitting the tank to be emptied with maximum speed. Furthermore I can assure you that there is nothing unusual about the depth and other specifications of Mr. Webber's plunge."

"Thank you, Mr. Ransford. I hope you'll pardon me if my questions seem rather stupid. You see I know nothing about such things. That's why I came to you. And if you don't mind I'd like to impose on your good nature for one moment more. Do you happen to have the plans of Mr. Webber's swimming pool in your files here?"

"Why yes. Want to see them?"

"If you will be so kind."

Ransford produced a set of blueprints, and handed them to Pryor, who studied them intently.

"Are these figures indicating the dimensions of the tank accurate?" he asked after a while.

"Of course they are accurate. How could they be otherwise?"

"I thought that possibly the size might have been changed between the time the blueprints were made and the excavation work started.

"Why do you question the accuracy of my figures?"

"Because they do not correspond to the actual dimensions of Mr. Webber's swimming pool."

"Just what do you mean?"

"The principal discrepancy is in the length. I paced it off yesterday. It can't be more than fifty feet. According to your plans the length of the pool is seventy-five feet."

Ransford started to say, "You must be mistaken—" but he stopped in the middle of the sentence and stammered, "I can account for that. When the pool was first built it was seventy-five feet long. Originally you know, Mr. Webber owned two adjoining lots, each with a frontage of fifty feet. His house was built on one lot and he used the other lot for recreational purposes. The swimming pool ran for twenty-five or thirty feet across the rear of the second lot. When he sold this lot to Mr. Saconi, the swimming pool was shortened to come within the boundaries of Mr. Webber's back yard."

"Wouldn't that account for the fact that Webber's pool is now only about five feet deep at its deepest end?"

Ransford waited for a while as if loath to admit this. Then he said, "Why, yes. Yes, of course. Funny I didn't think of that before. You see it was necessary to take a piece out of the deeper end of the plunge."

"And what happened to the part of the plunge which extended over onto Saconi's lot? Was it filled in?"

"Oh no. It was covered with a roof of concrete. The space above it is now occupied by an enclosed sand pile for Saconi's little boy, Angelo."

"I see. Mrs. Raymond tells me that you are very fond of little Angelo."

"I certainly am. All children interest me, and Angelo particularly."

"Did you by any chance happen to be in Mr. Saconi's back yard on the Sunday morning when George Raymond disappeared?"

Again that startled look came into Ransford's eyes, but this time he spoke without stammering. "Why yes. I was there playing with Angelo for a while. Why?"

"Perhaps you were fairly close to the wall of Mr. Webber's plunge. In that case you might have heard any unusual noise coming from the plunge."

"What do you mean by unusual noises?"

"Suppose, for instance, Mr. Raymond had shouted for help—or suppose he had engaged in a struggle with someone trying to abduct or harm him. If anything like that had happened while you were there, you would have heard it, would you not?"

"I suppose I would have heard it. But I can assure you that I heard nothing of the kind."

"It probably isn't necessary for me to ask you, if you saw any suspicious-looking strangers in the neighborhood that Sunday morning."

"I didn't see any strangers at all."

"Thank you. And now just one more favor, if I may impose on you for the last time. As a friend of Mr.

Saconi's, would you mind giving me a card of introduction to him?"

With a relieved expression which seemed to suggest that he would do anything to get rid of his visitor, Ransford said, "I shall be glad to," and he scribbled a note on one of his business cards.

As Pryor was leaving, Ransford said, "Do you expect to see Mr. Saconi to-day?"

"No. I have a lot of thinking to do and I can always do that best in my private office. Perhaps I shall see Mr. Saconi to-morrow."

"Your office is in Los Angeles, is it not?"

"Yes. In the Richfield Building. If you are over that way drop in and see me. Perhaps I may entertain you telling you about my hobby, just as you have entertained me with yours."

CHAPTER VII

The Threat

AS Pryor entered his "thinking room", he said to his secretary, "Don't be afraid to disturb me this time, Miss Walker. I'm expecting to hear from Mrs. Raymond. If she phones, connect her without calling me first."

Although Helen Franklin had not told Pryor that she would phone to him that afternoon, his guess proved to be remarkably prophetic. At about three o'clock the buzzer in Pryor's private office sounded the signal for him to answer the telephone.

"How is the master getting on with the mystery?" was Helen's first question.

"Famously! I've made a lot of progress since I saw you yesterday."

"Splendid! Do you mind telling me about it?"

"I shall be glad to do so."

"I'm only a few blocks away from your office right now. If I come to your door will you let me in?"

"Most assuredly. Not only that, but I have a special doormat with the word "Welcome" lettered on it—which I shall put out just for your benefit."

"O.K., my friend. Be right over!"

When she had arrived, and they were looking at each other across Pryor's walnut desk, she said to him, "Have you seen Walter Ransford yet?"

"Yes. I had a very interesting chat with him this morning."

"What do you think of him?"

"A very charming person. He told me a lot of fascinating things about his hobby. No doubt you know he likes to work with a microscope."

"Yes. But what is your impression of him? You'd hardly size him up as a killer, would you?"

"Perhaps not. But one can't always judge by first impressions."

Just then the buzzer sounded and Pryor took down the telephone.

Mrs. Raymond heard him say, "I can't understand you. Please come closer to the transmitter." While he was thus sparring for time, The Mastery of Mystery seized a pencil and rapidly scribbled something on a scratchpad, which he handed to Helen. This is what she read:

"Hurry to outer office and tell secretary to let you listen in on other phone."

Following these instructions she darted through the door and thrusting the note into Miss Walker's hand snatched up the telephone instrument on her desk. She was just in time to hear this:

"—away from Sidney Webber's swimming pool if you know what is good for you."

"What do you mean?" Pryor's voice said.

"Just this: If you don't lay off your investigation of George Raymond's murder, you are likely to be the next one to disappear."

"Who are you?" It was Pryor's voice again.

"Never mind who I am. Call me a friend who is trying to warn you against serious trouble. If you don't take the warning—you had better beware."

"Thank you very much for your courtesy," Pryor remarked in exactly the same tone he would use to a servant. "Is that all?"

"Yes that's all. But don't forget that every move you make is being watched." And over the wire came a click to indicate that the receiver had been hung up.

Pryor put down the instrument and rushed into the other office. He grabbed the telephone out of Mrs. Raymond's hands and began frantically to signal for the operator. When he heard the familiar "Number please?" he shouted, "Please ring up the number I was just connected with."

The telephone girl was not able to do this and Pryor wasted ten precious minutes locating an official of the telephone company, who had the authority and the willingness to trace the call for him. It was finally revealed that the mysterious phone message came from a drug store pay-station in Lankershim. Pryor got this establishment on the wire but nobody there could give him any information about the person who had last phoned from that station. When he had exhausted all the possibilities of investigating the matter by phone, Pryor turned to Helen Franklin and said:

"Pardon me, Mrs. Raymond. It was necessary for me to work fast. I hope you will overlook my seeming rudeness."

"There's nothing to apologize for," she answered graciously. "I understand perfectly. But why go to all that trouble. If you want to know who threatened you just now, I can tell you."

"I was in hopes you would be able to recognize the voice. That's why I told you to listen in. Who do you think it was?"

Very deliberately she answered, "Sidney Webber."

"Are you sure of that? It sounded to me as if he was talking in falsetto tones to disguise his voice."

"That's true. His voice was hard to recognize, I admit. But he gave himself away just the same. Didn't you notice that he spoke with a slight accent—an accent with a decidedly Teutonic flavor?"

"Yes, I did notice that. But might not the accent have been put on, as an extra coat of camouflage in addition to the falsetto voice?"

"Possibly. But the inflections were extremely reminiscent of Webber's manner of speaking. And when we learned that the call came from Lankershim, no further proof was needed. You know, of course, that the Ajax Studio is only a few miles from Lankershim. Webber could easily run over there between scenes of the picture he is directing. And don't forget that Webber is one of the few persons who knows that you are investigating this case. His wife of course told him all about your

visit to his place yesterday. We all know what wives are."

"I must admit that your inferences all sound logical," Pryor conceded. "But let us also keep in mind that there is at least one other person who knows about my interest in your husband's disappearance."

"By that, I suppose you mean Walter. Perhaps you think I warned him. But I didn't. I merely told him you were planning to build a swimming pool at your home and were looking for information about the best specifications for a small plunge. You didn't spill the beans yourself, did you?"

"Perhaps I did and perhaps I didn't. But again I'll be frank and admit that I feel certain to my own satisfaction that it wasn't Walter Ransford who phoned just now."

"Then it must have been Webber!"

"Not necessarily. Though the suspicion naturally points in his direction."

"Then don't you think it would be a good idea to have him arrested?"

"Why?" Pryor questioned.

"For two reasons: To prevent him from making a get-away and to insure your own safety."

"Then you really think the threat was made seriously?"

"There's no doubt about it. You don't know Webber as I do. He is absolutely ruthless, I tell you. I can't permit you to go on with this case unless you take precautions to protect yourself. Unless you promise to do so, I must insist that you drop your investigation right now."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Raymond, but I refuse to be dismissed at this stage of the game. You might have fired me yesterday when I gave you that opportunity, but now it is too late."

"You don't mean to tell me that you would risk your life—just for the sake of trying to solve a problem?"

To which the Master of Mystery replied, "Once I have undertaken the solution of a problem, nothing can stop me—not even the risk of death."

"Very well," she said with a shrug of her shapely shoulders. "But don't blame me if you end up on a marble slab in the morgue."

"I'm more likely to be what the German Ambassador called 'spurlos gesenkt' or 'sunk without a trace.'" Pryor grinned. "And now, suppose we go on with our discussion. What were we talking about when that phone call interrupted us?"

"About Walter Ransford. But suppose we drop him for the time being and talk about the other suspects. There are other suspects, are there not?"

"Oh yes, indeed. I have at least four very good suspects. And then of course there is the possibility that more than one person was involved in your husband's disappearance or death."

"From what you have hinted previously I take it then that you haven't yet succeeded in eliminating any of your original suspects."

"I'm afraid I haven't. I'm somewhat in the position of the colored cook whose mistress, after ordering a meal including poached eggs, changed her mind and told her to eliminate the eggs. I feel like quoting Mandy's reply: 'Sorry, Miss, but mah eliminator is done busted.' Perhaps you will be able to help me to get my eliminator functioning properly."

"Do you mean that you want me to help you to pick the most likely suspect?"

"Not so much as to eliminate the impossible ones."

"But why ask me? I've already told you what I think so many times that I'm almost blue in the face and still you refuse to listen to me."

Pryor laughed. "Of course I listen to you. But you must realize that I need more evidence than the unsupported opinion of any one person before I can form a sound conclusion."

"So I have observed. And you want me to help you collect more evidence; is that it?"

"Precisely."

"O.K. I'll be glad to do that if I can. Have you written out a list of your suspects?"

"Yes, Mrs. Raymond. I was mulling it over just before you arrived."

"May I see it?"

"If you'll promise not to be angry when you find your own name at the head of it."

"Oh that doesn't bother me," she said with a mirthless laugh. "You made it clear to me that I was under suspicion from the start. I'm getting used to it now. Let me see the list."

This is what she read on the slip of paper which Pryor handed to her:

GEORGE RAYMOND DISAPPEARANCE CASE

Assumption: (Not yet proved) G. R. was murdered

List of Possible Suspects:

| Name: | Motive: | Qualifications: |
|-----------------|---|---|
| Helen Franklin | Strong motive: Will profit financially from her husband's death. | There is not the least suggestion of criminal tendencies in her character or disposition. She claims she knows nothing about law or science. If this is true she doesn't fit in with present theory unless she had a confederate. |
| Walter Ransford | Strong motive: Loves Raymond's wife. Possibly hopes to benefit from inheritance. | Character and temperament uncertain. Has knowledge of science necessary for carrying out details of the murder. |
| Victor Saconi | Motive absent, so far as is known. (Jealousy angle must be investigated further.) | Character and temperament uncertain. Probably has the necessary knowledge of science. |
| Sidney Webber | Ample motive: Jealousy for G. R.'s success. Fear of losing position. | Murderous disposition (according to H. F.). Lacks scientific knowledge so far as is known but might have had a confederate. |
| John Doe | (Person at present unknown, who might have had motive for committing the murder or assisting one of the above in doing so.) | |

Helen Franklin read the list carefully. Then she handed it back, with the comment: "Thanks for the nice things you wrote about me. I hardly know whether to take them as bouquets or brickbats. You seem to imply that, in spite of my excellent motive, I am too chicken-hearted and too dumb to kill my husband, unless I had someone to help me."

Pryor laughed. "You insisted on seeing the list," he reminded her.

"But you didn't have to show it to me. Sometimes I think you are just kidding me and then again I am not so sure about it. But if you really do suspect me, aren't you afraid, now that I know you are hot on my trail, that I shall warn my accomplice and fly with him to some exotic country, where extradition treaties are unknown?"

"That's exactly what I should like you to do—if you are guilty," Pryor blandly informed her.

"You are very kind, Mr. Pryor, and I'd like to reciprocate. Before I run away, is there anything I can do to help you solve your puzzle?"

"Yes, there is. Won't you help me to shorten this list of mine?"

"What do you mean?"

"It won't take much, for instance, to eliminate Victor Saconi."

"Frankly, I don't see why you put him on your list in the first place."

"I had reasons. But I shall be glad to scratch his name off, if you can help me to verify your statement that he had no motive for doing away with your husband. As I suggested to you before, it often happens that a wife is the last person to hear about her husband's intrigues. Can you give me the names of some persons who would be able to corroborate your assumption?"

"Let me think." Helen picked up a fountain pen from Pryor's desk set and scribbled three names on a slip of paper. "These people would know the truth if anyone does. By exercising your remarkable powers of dissimulation you ought to get the information by phone in a few minutes."

"Thank you. I'll try it."

"Do you want me to wait while you call them?"

"If you wish. But I don't believe there will be any advantage in that. Besides, there's something else I'd like you to do for me. Could you arrange for me to see Mr. Webber for a few minutes either this afternoon or this evening?"

"I think so. It is almost time for Mr. Webber to be leaving the studio. Perhaps I can catch him by phone." She picked up the telephone instrument and added: "May I?"

"Of course."

When the connection was established, Pryor heard the following half of the telephone conversation:

"Good afternoon, Sidney. This is Helen Franklin."

Pretty well, under the circumstances. How is Rose?"

"That's too bad. I hope you haven't made any engagement for dinner this evening."

"That's fine. But if you don't mind, I'd rather have you come over to my apartment. I want you to meet a friend of mine."

"Never mind whether it is male or female. That's a dark and dirty mystery. Don't forget that little Helen will be there. You'll come won't you?"

"Why don't you drive right over from the studio?"

"Any time after six-thirty will be O.K. Toodle-oo!"

As she hung up the phone, she laughed, "Well, he fell for that one just as I thought he would. He probably thinks my mysterious friend is a good-looking woman. Won't he be disappointed though?"

"Not necessarily," Pryor reminded her. "Don't forget that little Helen will be there."

"And that reminds me. You must promise to follow my instructions. Here is my address," she handed him a card. "Make it a point to arrive in that neighborhood by six o'clock. Park your car where you can see the entrance. Watch for Mr. Webber. When he arrives, wait for a minute or two and then ring the bell. Will you do that?"

"Surely. But why all this abracadabra? I thought I had a monopoly on the mystery in this little plot."

"Then you'll have to think again. My reason for ask-

ing you to do this is as follows. By arriving later than he does you will have an excuse for outstaying him. The idea is that I don't want to be left alone with Sidney Webber. Understand?"

"Perfectly. You may depend on me to be a model chaperone."

"Thank you, sir. And now, I'd better hustle home and break the sad news to the cook."

"Before you leave, you'd better give me a description of Webber's car."

"You'll know it in a minute. It's a baby blue and orange colored Packard roadster and it's dolled up with accessories like a Christmas tree."

As soon as Mrs. Raymond had left, Pryor phoned to the three persons whose names she had given him. It is hardly necessary to chronicle the details of those telephone conversations. They convinced him that Saconi had been a very good friend of Raymond's and that he had no conceivable motive for wanting to do away with him.

"He certainly couldn't have done it without a motive," Pryor mused as he drew forth his list of suspects and crossed off the name of Victor Saconi.

CHAPTER VIII

The Fight at Helen's Apartment

FOLLOWING Helen Franklin's instructions, Pryor arrived in the Windsor Square district shortly after six o'clock. He parked his car on Wilshire Boulevard, a few feet from the entrance of the Los Altos Apartments. At about six forty-five Webber's ostentatious roadster pulled up to the curb. Pryor recognized it instantly from the description which Mrs. Raymond had given him.

A few minutes later, while Pryor was being introduced to Webber, the bell rang again and into Helen Franklin's apartment strode none other than Mr. Walter Ransford.

The architect tried to give the impression that his call was purely *impromptu*. This may have deceived Webber but not Pryor. When he had an opportunity to speak to Helen, without being heard by the other two, Pryor said, "I suppose you had an ulterior motive for inviting Mr. Ransford."

"Maybe. Perhaps I figured out that you will be able to size Sidney up better when he is annoyed. Get the idea? You can't tell much about the disposition of a bull, when you see him grazing contentedly in a lush pasture. The way to find out whether or not he is dangerous is to wave a red cloth in front of his nose."

"I see. And do you think Mr. Ransford would appreciate the honor, if he knew that he was merely a red cloth to excite your bully guest?"

"I don't think he minds. Perhaps he knows that there is another reason. For some time I have been looking for an excuse to invite Walter to dinner and this seems to be as good an opportunity as any."

"I see. In the absence of instructions, I hardly know how to behave in his case. Shall I try to freeze him out, too?"

"He came in last didn't he?"

"So he did. And was he, too, instructed to lie in wait outside your door?"

"I refuse to answer that saucy query," she laughed.

"Here comes Ethel with the highballs. You'll have one, of course, to build you up a bit?"

"Temulency is entirely out of my line," he informed her. "Nevertheless, rather than be regarded as a wet blanket, I'll imbibe a sip or two, just to be sociable."

"So sweet of you," she said with a touch of irony in her voice.

Ransford, too, drank sparingly, but Webber helped himself to one highball after another. This couldn't have been because he needed building-up. Pryor judged from the odor of Webber's breath that he was already pretty well "built-up" when he arrived.

During the meal, which followed on the heels of the highballs, Webber made himself very obnoxious by shooting a barrage of sarcastic and insulting remarks at Ransford. The architect responded none too good-naturedly. It was repeatedly necessary for Mrs. Raymond to exercise superhuman tact in order to divert the conversation back into less personal channels.

When the maid had cleared away the dishes, Helen tried to maneuver her guests in such a way that Pryor could hold a private conversation with Webber, but in this she was not very successful. The few questions which Pryor was able to sandwich in between the director's remarks brought forth only the most maudlin and impertinent answers.

At about nine-thirty, Helen was called to the telephone. She had scarcely left the room before Webber mumbled something about fetching cigarettes from his overcoat pocket and staggered in the direction of the small ante-room where the telephone instrument was located.

Ransford glared after him and half rose from his chair, but sank back again when Pryor distracted his attention by asking him some trite question.

A few minutes later Pryor and Ransford heard Helen's voice, speaking in a tone quite different from that which she had used while telephoning.

"Please, Sidney!" she was saying. "I'm not in the mood for anything like that."

"Ah, come on, Baby—be a good sport," came in a thick, hoarse voice which they knew to be Webber's.

"Let me alone, I tell you!" Helen pleaded.

In three long strides Ransford reached the door leading to the ante-room. He threw it open, revealing Helen Franklin struggling in the embrace of Sidney Webber. Grabbing him by the arm, Ransford swung him around and slapped him on the cheek with the flat of his hand. So great was the force of the blow that Webber, already wobbly on his legs, stumbled and fell sprawling against the table on which stood the phone.

When he recovered himself his face was ashen with anger.

Fumbling in his hip pocket, he drew forth a small but efficient-looking revolver. He aimed the gun at Ransford just as Helen sprang in between them in an effort to prevent Walter from striking Webber again.

Pryor was just in time to wrench the weapon out of Webber's hand. With the deftness of a man who understood firearms, he broke open the gun, extracted the cartridges and slipped them into his trouser pocket. Then he handed the unloaded pistol back to Webber as he remarked in a casual tone, "Come on, Mr. Webber. I think it is time you and I were leaving."

Except for profanely muttered protests, Webber submitted quietly while Pryor helped him put on his coat and led him to the elevator. As Webber staggered toward

his car, Pryor took his arm and said, "Listen to me Webber. After what has just happened you ought to realize that you are not in a fit condition to drive an automobile. You'd better let me drive you to some place where you can sober up."

With an obscene oath, Webber growled, "Mind your own business. Guess I can drive my own car if I wanna."

"Of course you can if you insist," said Pryor in a conciliatory tone, "But first won't you join me in a hamburger and a cup of coffee?"

"Say, that's not a bad idea a-tall," the director mumbled as Pryor took his arm and led him toward his coupé. He drove to the White Spot on Wilshire Boulevard near La Brea, and there they sat on stools and ate hamburgers. Under the influence of two cups of coffee, Webber became comparatively sober.

As Pryor drove him back to Windsor Square, where his ornate roadster was parked, Webber remarked, "You seem to be a reckless kind of fellow, Pryor."

"What makes you think that?"

"The way you butt into other people's affairs. If you know what is good for you you will mind your own business from now on."

There was something reminiscent about that phrase, "if you know what is good for you." It reminded Pryor of the threat he had received over the phone that afternoon.

"Thanks for your advice," he responded. "Ordinarily, as you suggest, it is a good thing to mind one's own business. But it happens that sometimes it is one's duty to mind other folks' business as well. In my case, duty always comes first. Are you driving to Malibu Beach to-night?"

"Sure I am. What of it?"

"Since to-morrow is Saturday, possibly you will be at home all day."

"I usually do spend all day Saturday at the beach. What business is that of yours?"

"None, whatever. But perhaps you will be interested to know that I expect to call on you at your Malibu home to-morrow morning."

In a threatening voice, Webber said, "Is that so? If you do, you'll find me ready for you."

As soon as Pryor reached his home he called Mrs. Raymond's number on the phone. An anxious voice answered, "Good evening. This is Helen Franklin."

"Good evening, Mrs. Raymond. This is Justin Pryor. I called you up to tell you that I got Webber calmed down and sobered up and started on his way to Malibu."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Pryor. Thank you so much for what you did to-night. Your presence of mind saved us from a frightful tragedy."

"I'm afraid that is slightly exaggerated. There is something else I want to tell you. To-morrow morning I am going to call on Webber at his Malibu Beach home. In case anything happens to me, you will know who is responsible."

"But, Mr. Pryor—You mustn't do this. Don't you realize now what a risk you are taking?"

"Nevertheless I intend to finish my job. And I don't think anybody is going to stop me. By the way, I left so hastily that I forgot to tell you how much I enjoyed your hospitality."

"I'm afraid my dinner party was anything but enjoyable."

"On the contrary, I enjoyed it very much indeed and for very good reasons. It brought me a bit closer to the solution of our problem."

CHAPTER IX

Glands and Animal Freaks

BEFORE leaving his home Saturday morning, Pryor phoned to James Dillon and made an appointment to meet him just outside the gateway of Malibu Beach. He found the Deputy Sheriff waiting for him.

"Hello, Mr. Pryor. What do you know?" Dillon greeted him.

"I'll tell you presently. First let me hear what success you have had."

"You didn't expect me to catch the murderer this quick did you?"

"Of course not. You are still on his trail though, are you not?"

"Sure I am. But the first thing to do is to find the body."

"Precisely. Let us hope that there is enough of the body left to find. Have you located any secret hiding places yet?"

"Not yet. But don't worry—if there is any such thing hereabouts, I'll find it."

"Perhaps I can give you a helpful suggestion. Do you happen to know that Webber's swimming pool was seventy-five feet long when it was first built and that part of it was roofed over when the pool was shortened?"

"What of it?"

"Can't you see what that means? There must be another tank at least twenty feet square and from five to nine feet deep immediately adjacent to Webber's plunge, on the north side of it. There's plenty of room there to hide a body."

"How'd you happen to find out about this?"

"Don't you remember my calling your attention to the large size of the outlet, when you were inspecting the pool the day before yesterday? That opening is more than big enough to admit a man's body. That started me thinking. I verified my suspicion by checking the architect's plans of the pool."

"What do you think I ought to do about it?"

"The first thing that ought to be done is to ascertain whether or not the metal grating that covers the outlet can be opened from the swimming pool."

"But to find that out somebody would have to get right into the water of the plunge wouldn't they?"

"Somebody undoubtedly would have to do that," Pryor agreed.

"And you think you are going to wish that job onto me?"

"I'm not trying to wish it on anybody. I'm merely making a suggestion."

"Well you don't need to get suggestive with me. I'm not the man to run away from danger when duty calls, but when it comes to going swimming in the pool where Mr. Raymond was murdered, you can excuse me."

"If you are afraid, I suppose I shall be obliged to do it myself," said Pryor contemptuously.

"Well, if you put it that way, I guess I got as much guts as you have. But I have a better idea."

"Please enlighten me."

"Why not let the water out of the pool?"

"I thought of that. But I'm afraid it isn't going to be so easy to get Webber's permission to drain the tank. I don't suppose you can force him to do it against his will, can you?"

"Not without a court order. And that will take time. But why do you think Webber will make a fuss about emptying his tank?"

"Merely a guess on my part. Perhaps I am wrong. Suppose you ask him. And while you are doing that, I'll make a call on Mr. Saconi who lives next door."

"What do you want to see him for?"

"To get some information concerning glands and freaks."

"That's too deep for me. How long do you think it will take you?"

"It ought not to take more than half an hour."

"O.K. And when you get through with your glands and freaks will you go swimming with me in Webber's plunge?"

"I shall be delighted. In fact, I brought my bathing suit with me for that very purpose."

Pryor and Dillon drove through the gateway and parked their cars some distance away from Webber's swimming pool.

"I'll meet you here in about half an hour," said Pryor as he started toward Saconi's front door.

Though he had some difficulty in getting past the butler, Pryor, thanks to Ransford's card of introduction, was finally permitted to enter the sacred premises and to hold conversation with the husband of Angela Piuma.

Saconi received him very graciously. Knowing that the Italian scientist had been in the United States for a comparatively short time, Pryor had expected to hear him talk in broken English. Much to Pryor's surprise, Saconi's diction was impeccable. Speaking with the cultured inflections of an Oxford graduate, he gave the impression that he was in a class-room lecturing to a group of advanced students.

Pryor lost no time in getting to the point. "Mr. Ransford tells me that you are an authority on the ductless glands. I hope I am not imposing on you if I ask you a question or two on this subject."

"Not at all. Rest assured that I shall be extremely happy to assist you. What is it that you desire to know?"

"I have heard," said Pryor, "that the secretions of the ductless glands have a great deal to do with the growth and development of animals. That is true is it not?"

"Most assuredly. Not only do the endocrine glands, as they are called, influence the development of animals but they have many other attributes as well. One of the most familiar examples is given by the adrenal gland. As is suggested by the name, the adrenals are located above the kidneys. The adrenal gland is double layered, like a nut inside a shell. Each of these parts secretes a fluid known as a hormone. The central core produces one kind of hormone and the enclosing capsule another kind. The hormone from the outer shell regulates the secondary sex characteristics, such as the hair on the face of men, soprano voices of women, differences in male and female figures and so forth. The inside core secretes a fluid which scientists have been able to isolate. This is called adrenalin. It is one of the most poisonous substances ever discovered. If an ounce of adrenalin was dissolved in a large lake and you drank a single cupful of that water it would be a fatal dose."

"But isn't adrenalin used in medicine?"

"Only in very dilute solutions. Just how much it has to be diluted is demonstrated by the following illustration: Picture a procession of tank trucks, each containing 600 gallons of water. There are 200 trucks to the mile and the parade is 20 miles long. It would take all that water to dilute one ounce of adrenalin enough so that it would be safe to drink a few drops of the solution."

"There is always some adrenalin in the blood of human beings is there not?"

"Yes, but the amount is very minute—about one part of adrenalin to a billion parts of arterial blood."

"Seems to me I remember hearing that the adrenals have something to do with fear and courage," Pryor remarked.

"Oh, yes. The hormone secreted by the inside core of the adrenal gland has a very powerful effect on the blood supply. It causes the arteries to contract their walls. This increases the pressure. It also causes the heart to beat faster, starts the sweat glands working and makes the hair stand on end. All this not only makes the animal look larger and fiercer, but it also generates extra energy for fighting or for running away, whichever it is decided to do."

"That's very interesting. Would you mind telling me about the glands that regulate the growth of animals? The thyroid has something to do with that, has it not?"

"Yes. But the effect of the thyroid on growth is in a certain sense negative."

"Please pardon my dumbness, but I'm afraid I don't understand what you mean by that."

"Permit me to elucidate. There have been a number of significant experiments performed upon polliwogs. A tadpole, you know, makes an excellent subject. There are several reasons for this, which I don't need to go into during the present discussion. Let it suffice to say that if a polliwog is deprived of its thyroid gland it will keep on growing larger but will never turn into a frog. On the other hand, if a tadpole is permitted to retain its thyroid gland and is fed thyroid substance, it will within a very few days turn into a full-fledged frog which will be extremely small."

"Is that the way human midgets are produced?" Pryor wanted to know.

"Not at all—although the thyroid gland undoubtedly has a great deal to do with the creation of dwarfs. Midgets result from getting an overdose of thyroxine, as the thyroid hormone is called, but from just the opposite cause, namely thyroid deficiency. There is a disease called cretinism—a sort of arrested development. It can be cured by injections of thyroxine. Sometimes it is relieved by doses of iodine salts. It has been discovered that iodine salts form the chemical basis of thyroxine, you know."

"I've heard that iodine will cure a goiter," said Pryor. "But that doesn't sound reasonable to me. Isn't a goiter caused by too much thyroid extract in the system?"

"By no means. That is a mistake—yet one that is easy to make. A goiter does not indicate overproduction of thyroid hormone, but quite the reverse. When this gland finds it cannot secrete enough of the hormone to take care of the needs of the body it tries to make up the deficiency by multiplying the number of its own cells. Thus it will be seen that a goiter is due not to superabundance but to lack of the thyroid hormone."

"But suppose a person's thyroid gland did start a

campaign of overproduction. Wouldn't its owner develop into a giant?"

"No. Excessive size is caused by another gland. An oversupply of thyroxine tends to speed up development, as was illustrated by the case of the tadpoles which changed into tiny frogs within a few days. There was a case recorded of a child born in England which went through a similar process of development in a few years. It died of old age—a wrinkled, grey haired, elderly man—at the age of six years. That was undoubtedly due to overactivity on the part of his thyroid gland."

"You just said that excessive size is caused by another gland. By that you mean the pituitary gland, do you not?"

Saconi eyed his visitor narrowly as he said, "You seem to know something about glands yourself, Mr. Pryor."

"Very little. What knowledge I have is very limited and superficial, I can assure you."

"You are right about the pituitary gland. One of its functions is to regulate the growth and ultimate size of the animal's body."

"Then it has other functions?"

"Oh yes. The pituitary has been called the 'Grand Marshal of the glands.' Anatomically it is like a Board of Directors or General Staff. It seems to regulate the activities of the other glands and to maintain a proper balance between them. Like the adrenal gland it consists of two parts, but instead of being like a nut inside of a shell, the pituitary really consists of two distinct glands, an anterior gland and a posterior gland. It is the anterior portion which regulates growth."

"The pituitary glands are located at the base of the brain are they not?" Pryor asked.

"Yes. They are in a hollow part of the skull. This cavity is sometimes called 'the skull within a skull'. Another name for it is 'the Turk's saddle'. The pituitary glands are better protected than any other organs of the body. This is another thing that makes us think that it must be the most important gland of all."

"Has the secretion of the pituitary gland been isolated yet?"

"Oh yes. It used to be thought that there was only one hormone of this gland. It was called Pituitrin. Obstetricians have used it as an aid to childbirth. Not long ago a doctor from Detroit, by the name of Oliver Kamm, succeeded in separating two distinct hormones of the pituitary gland. He called one of them *oxytocin* and other *vasopressin*. Previously some scientist at the University of California had proved that the pituitary has two functions besides that of bossing the other glands. They are the duties of controlling growth and initiating maturity."

"What about the giant in the side-show?" Pryor wanted to know. "Is he a product of too much pituitary hormone?"

"Unquestionably. One of the most famous giants of history was McGrath, the Irish giant. When he died an autopsy was performed. His pituitary gland was almost as large as a hen's egg. In normal human beings this gland is no larger than the tip of the little finger."

"Have any experiments been performed to determine the effect of pituitary extract upon animals?"

"Many such experiments have been performed. By daily injections of pituitary fluid, rats have been made to grow over twice their normal size. Giant salamanders have been created in like manner."

"I suppose that the ever faithful polliwogs have done their share of contributing knowledge concerning the pituitary gland."

"Oh, yes, indeed. In one interesting series of experiments the pituitary glands were removed from some tadpoles. They refused to metamorphose into frogs, but continued to grow larger. They also changed color, their skins becoming silvery white. When pituitary hormones were restored to them they became normal again."

"How about the lower forms of life? Have any experiments been performed to determine the effects of hormones, as you call them, on simple organisms—such as amoebas?"

Saconi's half-squinting eyes opened wide, as if this query had caught him by surprise. But he soon recovered himself and said, "It's rather singular that you should ask such a question. Experiments of that sort have been performed quite recently and with startling results. However, the reports of these experiments are not yet ready for publication."

Pryor did not press him for details. Instead of doing this, he directed the discussion into another channel.

"Suppose extra amounts of both thyroid and pituitary fluids were injected into the blood of an animal, at the same time, might it not produce both rapid growth and abnormally large size?"

"It would be quite logical to expect such a result."

"I see. A moment ago I asked you about the possible effect of glandular hormones on simple organisms. You are of course familiar with the habits of such creatures."

"Merely in a superficial way."

"Seems to me I remember hearing that such organisms multiply not by sexual reproduction but by dividing themselves. That's true isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Is it conceivable that such a creature could in some manner be prevented from dividing itself?"

"Of course it is conceivable. The mere fact that you thought of it as a possibility makes it conceivable."

"So it does. And if an amoeba was prevented from dividing itself it might keep on growing larger and larger until it attained enormous proportions. That also is conceivable, isn't it?"

Again Saconi looked at Pryor with widely opened lids and with bulging eyeballs. In a voice that suggested the ring of a naked sword he asked, "Just what are you driving at Mr. Pryor?"

"I'm not driving at anything," Pryor laughed. "If I have been too inquisitive or too presumptuous, please pardon me."

"But surely there is some purpose behind these questions of yours—some purpose that is not entirely apparent upon the surface," Saconi persisted. "Again I repeat—just what are you driving at?"

"My purpose is merely the gratification of my hobby. Your hobby is glands and it is a very fascinating subject. My hobby is solving puzzles."

"You mean cross-word puzzles?"

"Sometimes my problems are similar to cross-word puzzles. But they are more analogous to jig-saw puzzles. You have been very helpful to me and I appreciate your kindness. These questions of mine which you have answered so graciously and so interestingly, have been the means of fitting together several important sections of my puzzle."

"I can readily understand that you are an expert on puzzles," Saconi said with a grin. "You even talk in riddles. I still fail to comprehend your purpose in coming here. You don't happen to be a detective, do you?"

Now it was Pryor's turn to look surprised. Fortunately his carefully trained "poker face" once more camouflaged the momentary feeling of alarm which Saconi's question provoked.

With a good-natured chuckle, he replied, "That's a good one on me. Surely you don't think I look like a flat-footed dick, do you?"

"Not exactly," Saconi smiled. "But one never can tell. Will you excuse me for a moment or two?"

When Saconi returned he was carrying a tray on which were two glasses and a queerly shaped bottle wrapped in straw.

"What do you say to a little drink, Mr. Pryor? I have here some very rare wine which I smuggled in myself from Italy." So saying he uncorked the bottle and filled both glasses.

He lifted one of the goblets and was about to hand it to his guest, but Pryor, pretending not to notice the proffered glass, picked up the other one and said, "Here's to the success of our respective hobbies, Doctor Saconi."

Saconi was about to raise his glass when it slipped out of his hand and crashed to the floor.

"So clumsy of me," he apologized. "I'll fetch another glass."

Just then the butler entered and said, "I beg your pardon, Doctor. There's a man at the door who asked to see Mr. Pryor. Shall I show him in?"

Without giving Saconi time to answer, Pryor said, "Please don't bother. I was just leaving anyway. If you'll excuse me, I'll join my friend outside."

At the door he found James Dillon waiting for him.

"Why did you come here?" Pryor reproved him. "I told you I'd meet you where our cars are parked."

"I know it. But something awful important has happened. Thought you would want to be put wise."

Dillon was as excited as a hen with a brood of ducklings, but Pryor was owlishly calm as he said, "Don't tell me that Webber has disappeared already."

With his mouth open, the Deputy Sheriff stared at Pryor for several seconds before he stammered, "How in heck did you know that Webber had beat it? He wasn't missed until two minutes ago."

CHAPTER X

A Preposterous Theory

PRYOR did not answer Dillon's question. Instead, he countered with, "How did you find out about it?"

"It was like this: I rang the bell and asked for Mr. Webber. The maid wasn't going to let me in, but I showed my badge and made such a fuss, that Mrs. Webber came to the door. She told me that her husband was in the swimming pool and that if I wanted to I could go out there and see him. I went to the tank but couldn't find hide nor hair of him. Then I goes back to the house and reports to Mrs. Webber. She tells me to wait in the hall while she goes upstairs to see if he is dressing. When she comes back she says that Webber is no place in the house."

"Then what happened?" Pryor prompted him.

"I asked her if he wasn't out on the beach. She says she don't think so but maybe that's where he was. I talks her into helping me hunt for him. By that time she is worried herself and comes along without making a fuss. We search the beach from one end to the other and no Webber shows up."

"Did you see anyone else you knew on the beach?"

"Sure. I seen Helen Franklin. She's with Mrs. Webber now."

"Was anybody with Mrs. Franklin when you first saw her?"

"Sure. There was five or six people with her. They was all in their bathing suits."

"Did you get the names of any of them?"

"Course not. I was looking for Webber."

"Did you search anywhere else besides on the beach?"

"No. When we found out he wasn't there, we went back to the house. Mrs. Webber checked up on his clothes. The only duds that was missing was his bathing suit. His car was in the garage and the chauffeur hadn't seen him all morning."

"Then what happened?"

"I tells Mrs. Webber that maybe her husband had called in to have a drink with one of his neighbors. She phones to everybody she can think of but nobody has seen him. Then I comes over to get you. What do you think we'd better do about it?"

"What do you suggest?" Pryor parried.

"I was going to phone headquarters and have them throw out the dragnet for a man in a black and white bathing suit. Don't you think that would be a good idea?"

Again Pryor dodged the question by asking another one.

"Do you think Webber disappeared voluntarily?"

"Course he did."

"What makes you think so?"

"He probably saw me coming. He knew I was on his trail, so he beat it before I could nab him. Ain't that the way it looks to you?"

"Perhaps you are right," Pryor conceded. "Though it seems highly improbable to me that a man as clever as Mr. Webber is would try to run away even from you, without first changing his bathing suit for some more suitable raiment. I should think he would at least put on a pair of pants with a few dollars in the pockets. Don't you think so?"

Dillon scratched his head.

"Gosh, this thing is getting more mysterious than ever," he muttered. "What would you do if you was me?"

"If I were in your place, I'd make a more thorough search of the swimming pool."

"I've already searched it. You know darn well that there's no chance for nobody to hide there."

"Are you sure about that? Don't forget the large outlet—large enough for a man's body to get through."

"You don't think Webber could be hiding out in there do you?"

"I don't think Webber is hiding anywhere," Pryor replied. "Nevertheless I believe that our first duty is to investigate the outlet of the plunge. Do you want to come with me or shall I do it alone?"

"Guess I may as well come along," drawled Dillon-reluctantly.

"I'll go get my bathing suit. Suppose you ask Mrs. Webber if she can dig up a suit for you and also try to locate a place where we can change our clothes."

As Pryor walked around the corner of the high wall at the rear of Webber's estate he saw someone crouching beside his car, which was parked several rods away. The man lost no time in hurrying away. It was impossible to distinguish his features, but Pryor noticed that he was wearing overalls and held in his hand something that looked like a screw driver or a file. Pryor followed him through a passageway leading to the beach. As completely as if the earth had swallowed him the man in overalls had vanished. But out on the beach, lolling indolently on the sand was none other than Walter Ransford. He was gazing out to sea and for that reason did not seem to notice Pryor. Concluding that he would gain nothing by making his presence known, the Master of Mystery went back to his car and procured his bathing suit. He also fetched a tow rope from the tool compartment of his car.

Back of Webber's place he found Dillon waiting for him.

"The old lady was very nice about it," he said. "She let me have a suit and told me we could change in her dressing room. It seems that they have special rooms on the ground floor where folks can put on their bathing suits and take showers. She told me to be sure to take a bath before I went into the plunge. Now what do you think of that?"

"It sounds like a dirty insinuation," Pryor laughed. "Perhaps it is an old Malibu custom."

When they were clad in swimming suits, Dillon said, "Do you think there's any use for both of us to go into the water?"

"Perhaps not. If you have no objections, I'll go in first. I don't expect any trouble, but just to be on the safe side, I'll tie this rope around my waist. You hang on to the other end of it and stay on deck. If I seem to be in difficulties, haul me out."

"O.K., Mr. Pryor," said Dillon, as he spit on his hands and took a firm hold of the thick rope.

Pryor dropped into the water. He found that it was deeper than he had estimated. He could not stand on bottom without submerging his nose.

"Here I go," he called out as he took a deep breath and, with his eyes wide open, dove head foremost to the bottom. To prevent his body from rising at once to the surface, he caught hold of the metal grating which covered the outlet. With his free hand he groped around trying to locate a latch or lever that would release the grating. He also attempted to twist it with the idea that it might be screwed fast, but though he made several trials, coming up for air between times, he was not able to get the grating open. When he finally swam to the ladder and scrambled out of the water, his assistant heaved a sigh of relief.

"What did you find out?" Dillon asked.

"I couldn't budge it," Pryor panted. "It can't be opened from this side, I am certain of that."

"And a guy couldn't very well crawl though the holes in that grating, could he?" was Dillon's sage contribution.

"Hardly. We'll have to look elsewhere for the entrance to the secret compartment."

"Do you think we'll need to do any more swimming?" Dillon asked.

"I don't think *we* shall—and *you* won't have to do any swimming either." Pryor smiled as they returned to the dressing room.

When he emerged, fully clad, Pryor was surprised to see Mrs. Raymond sitting beside the bridge table.

"Good morning, Mr. Pryor," she greeted him. "I've been waiting for you. Would you mind having a little chat with me? You'll excuse us, won't you, Mr. Dillon?"

"Sure thing, Miss Franklin," said the deputy. Then to Pryor he added. "I'll take a look around and see if I can locate that other entrance."

"What is he talking about?" Helen asked when Dillon was out of earshot.

"That's just one of our professional mysteries," Pryor teased her.

"You've heard about Mr. Webber running away, I suppose."

"What makes you think he ran away? Is it another case of feminine intuition?"

"No. Just common sense. Webber probably knew that the net was tightening around him. He absconded while he had a chance. How else could you account for his absence?"

"Hasn't it occurred to you that Mr. Weber may have met with the same fate that overtook your husband?"

"What ever put that idea into your head?" she exclaimed as she stared at him incredulously.

"Just common sense, as you so aptly call it. The two cases are closely parallel. Like your husband, Webber was last seen going swimming in a certain plunge. Like him, he disappeared mysteriously. He was wearing only a bathing suit and he left behind him all his clothing and his money. It certainly doesn't look like absconding to me."

"Then what does it look like to you?"

"Really, I hesitate to tell you, Mrs. Raymond."

"You mean, I suppose, that you haven't any ideas on the subject."

"On the contrary, I have a very definite theory. I'll admit that it appears to be utterly preposterous, but I can conceive of no other way in which these things could have happened."

"Now you are getting mysterious again. Won't you please explain your theory in simple language so that even I can understand it?"

"Are you sure you want me to tell you this?"

"Why, of course I do."

"Then please prepare yourself for a shock. It is my belief that both your husband and Mr. Webber were devoured by a terrible water monster."

A look of horror swept over Helen's lovely features.

"How frightful!" she gasped. "Surely you don't mean that they were eaten alive by a shark or a sea serpent."

"Not exactly. The monster that I have pictured in my imagination has no definite identity or structure. It is formless—like a gigantic amoeba."

"Amoeba? What in the world is that?"

"It is the name of a certain kind of micro-organism. Mr. Ransford has thousands of them in a beaker at his office."

"But I thought you said it was a monster—big enough to devour a man."

"That is mere conjecture on my part—a purely imaginative conception fabricated to fit our picture. The amoebas Mr. Ransford has are so tiny that they cannot

be seen except with the aid of a powerful microscope."

"Then you don't know that such a monster as you have described actually exists?"

"No, but we can soon verify or disprove my theory. If my hypothesis is correct, the giant amoeba must be living in a secret tank, within a few feet of where you are now sitting."

Mrs. Raymond jumped up and looked about her apprehensively.

"Oh!" she gasped. "You frighten me!"

"I'm sorry," Pryor apologized. "I didn't mean to alarm you. I thought you would understand that if this creature does exist it is dangerous only in the water. Please sit down again. You are perfectly safe here I can assure you."

Helen took from her handbag a filmy, ridiculously inadequate handkerchief and dabbed at the perspiration which had formed in beads on her forehead. After a while she said, "It is foolish of me to get excited. As a matter of fact I can't believe that this absurd monster of yours could possibly exist."

"I'll admit that it sounds preposterous," Pryor conceded. "But the absurdities of yesterday become the commonplaces of tomorrow."

"What I can't understand," Helen resumed, "is how such a creature as you describe could haunt this swimming pool without at some time or another being seen."

"That is easy to account for," Pryor told her. "In supposing that my theory has some foundation, we must also assume that the movements of the monster are controlled by a human being. And this person must be a criminal of superior knowledge and fiendish ingenuity. Whoever planned this crime would naturally arrange matters so that the monster could be made to go in and out of the plunge, whenever he or she wanted it to do so."

"You mean that the monster was trained?"

"In one sense of the word, yes. Amoebas can be forced to move from one place to another by a stimulus known as 'chemitaxis.' To apply this principle to our hypothetical case, it would only be necessary for the murderer to drop a tiny capsule of a certain substance into the water of the plunge and the giant amoeba would move unerringly toward that place. Anything in the way that would serve as food would be seized, enveloped and digested. Then it could be coaxed back into the secret tank in a similar manner."

Mrs. Raymond shook her head and said, "You certainly have a peculiar imagination, Mr. Pryor. But why do you tell me all this when you know it is only guess-work on your part. Why didn't you wait until you had investigated this secret tank and had either confirmed your theory or proved it to be utter nonsense—as I firmly believe it to be?"

Pryor smiled. "I'll admit that my disclosure is somewhat premature. I have three excuses: First, I have never learned how to resist the coaxings of an attractive woman; second, I get a kick out of forecasting the solutions of my problems before I have verified them; and third, I am egregiously vain."

"You vain?" she exclaimed. "I would hardly call you vain."

"In one thing only I am vain—and that is in matters pertaining to my unerring skill in solving puzzles. I cannot forego an occasional bit of braggadocio. That's why I told you about my theory before it had been veri-

fied—because I am absolutely certain that it will be substantiated by the facts."

"Perhaps, if you are so infallible, you will also be able to give me the name of the murderer."

"Perhaps," he said cryptically.

"Have you made any more additions to your list of suspects? Have you learned the real name of your hypothetical Mr. John Doe?"

"The answer to both questions is no. But it is of course obvious to you that we must now eliminate Mr. Webber from our list."

"I can't agree with you. But, if you think that, it means that there are only two suspects left—myself and Mr. Ransford. Perhaps you think we are both guilty—that we conspired to murder my husband."

Pryor said nothing and Mrs. Raymond continued. "If you really believe anything so absurd as that, you are certainly making an awfully dumb mistake when you reveal all your theories to me."

"What makes you think that?"

"Because you have tipped off your hand. It would be a simple matter for me to warn my accomplice and fly with him."

"As I told you before, that's exactly what I would want you to do—if you were guilty. After all, I am not concerned about punishing criminals. My only interest is in solving the puzzle." With an inscrutable smile on his face, Pryor added, "So if you are guilty, I would advise you to depart without delay."

There was a note suggestive of exasperation in Helen's voice as she declared, "Excuse me for saying so, Mr. Pryor, but you have turned out to be a sad disappointment to me. You pretend to be very wise but I have the feeling that you are even more at sea than are any of us."

She had expected Pryor to become offended at this, but the Master of Mystery merely laughed good-naturedly. "I can easily understand your viewpoint. I really owe an apology. I'm afraid I have been guilty of joking ill advisedly. My excuse is that I tackled this case purely for entertainment. Hence I have tried to get as much fun out of it as possible. I'm sorry indeed if my crude attempts at being humorous have caused you any distress."

Mrs. Raymond refused to be appeased. "You haven't caused me any distress," she responded. "You have merely opened my eyes. I'd like to make a substantial wager that you don't know any more than I do about how my husband was murdered or who murdered him."

"I'm sorry," Pryor told her, "but I never gamble. On the other hand I am perfectly willing to stake my reputation on the accuracy of my predictions. And to me that reputation is worth more than all the property I own."

"You mean that you think you know the name of the murderer now?"

"I am positive that I know it. An hour ago I couldn't have said that, but now everything is absolutely clear to me. In order to prove this to you I am going to place my reputation in your hands." Pryor tore a leaf from his note book and, holding the paper in such a way that she could not see it, scribbled something on it. Then he folded it several times and sealed the edges with an uncanceled postage stamp which he took from his pocket.

Handing the paper to her, he said, "This contains the

name of your husband's murderer. I am entrusting it to you and am asking you to keep this unopened until I have made my solution public. My reason for sealing it is not lack of confidence in your integrity. It is merely a device to help you to remember this agreement. Is that satisfactory to you?"

"Sure it is. But if you leave this with me, how do you know but that I shall open it before you make your solution public?"

"If you are afraid, you have my permission to open it right now," Pryor told her.

For a second or two, Helen turned the wad of paper over and over in her hand. Once she thrust a slender finger between the edges that were held together by the stamp but when she saw the expression of disappointment on Pryor's face, she pulled her finger away and quickly put the paper in her handbag.

"You needn't worry," she assured him. "I shan't break the seal until you command me to do so."

"Thank you. I knew I could depend on you."

Then, his eyes twinkling, he held up his hand with his fingers crossed.

CHAPTER XI

Pryor's Peril

PRYOR was just about to say good-bye to Mrs. Raymond when Dillon appeared on the scene. He had his watch in his hand.

"Excuse me, Mr. Pryor," he said, "but it's nearly twelve-thirty. What do you say we go some place and tie on the nose-bag?"

"I'll be with you in a moment," Pryor told him.

"Suppose you two gentlemen wait until I speak to Mrs. Webber," Helen interposed. "I'm sure I can persuade her to invite you to have luncheon here."

"Don't bother her, I beg of you," Pryor insisted. "Mrs. Webber must be very much upset about her husband. She has worries enough without the trouble of looking after us. On my way here I saw a barbecue-stand alongside of the road. We'll just hop in my car and drive over there for sandwiches and coffee."

"Sure," Dillon chimed in. "Tell Mrs. Webber thanks for her kind invitation, which she hasn't given us yet, and that we don't want her to make no fuss over us."

By this time Pryor had forgotten about the mysterious man he had seen near his car. He did notice that his automobile steered crankily, but attributed this to the roughness of the gravel road. When he was out on the smoothly paved highway the difficulty was scarcely noticeable. He soon located the barbecue-stand and he and Dillon partook of a modest lunch. On the way back, shortly after they had turned off on the dirt road that led to the beach, something snapped and the car went plowing through the sandy ground bordering the road. Fortunately Pryor was driving slowly and the car was soon brought to a stand-still. When he investigated the cause of the accident he discovered that the rod connecting the wheel with the steering knuckle had broken. From the shiny appearance of the metal at the place where the break occurred he knew that the rod had been filed almost through.

"Looks like we are on the right trail," he remarked to Dillon. "The murderer must know we are close on his

heels or he wouldn't have attempted such a desperate scheme to stop us."

This assumption was corroborated a few minutes later when Pryor and Dillon stepped inside the walls of Webber's swimming pool. One of the chairs from the bridge set had been placed so it almost blocked the entrance of the plunge. Fastened to the back of the chair was a note printed in pencil on a leaf torn from a scoring pad. It read as follows:

"To the Master of Mystery:

If you have lived long enough to come back here you are lucky, but don't expect your luck to save you again. Next time a more certain way of getting rid of you will be used. Heed this warning and cease your investigation at once—if you know what is good for you."

Pryor showed the note to Dillon, saying, "What did I tell you?"

"Gosh," the deputy exclaimed. "That sure looks like he means business. Do you think I'd better phone for more men to help us?"

"That ought not to be necessary. You are armed are you not?"

"Sure," said Dillon as he tapped the bulge in his hip pocket. "I got my six-shooter with me; but this guy may be too tough for me to handle alone."

"I wouldn't worry about that," Pryor assured him. "Most crooks are yellow when it comes to an open showdown."

"What do you think we'd better do next?"

"You can suit yourself, Mr. Dillon. For my part, I intend to continue my investigation exactly as I planned it. On the other hand I'd appreciate very much getting some help from you if you are willing to give it to me."

"Sure I'm willing. What do you want me to do?"

"Ring the bell of the house next door. Inquire for Mr. Saconi. If he isn't there, ask if there is some one at home who can give you permission to search the back yard. Show your badge and tell them anything you want to, so long as you get leave to spend ten or fifteen minutes in that yard. If you put that over, give me a whistle and I'll meet you there."

A few minutes later Pryor, in response to the whistle, Dillon's signal, joined him in the rear of Saconi's home. At the corner just north of Webber's swimming pool there was a fenced off place which manifestly had been set aside for a child's sand pile. Pryor found a small spade and proceeded to dig a hole in the sand. At the second shovelfull he struck something hard. In a few seconds he had uncovered a layer of cement.

"See," he exclaimed. "It's just as I told you. Under this sand is the cement roof of the secret tank. There must be some way of getting into it from this side. Let's see if we can locate the opening."

He explored the area covered by the sand pile, probing it with the spade until he heard a metallic ring. After a few minutes of digging he unearthed an iron disk, similar to those which are used to cover the manholes of sewers. He tried to pry up one edge of it, but was not able to do this with the thin-bladed spade.

"See if you can dig up a crowbar or a pickaxe, will you Dillon?"

"Sure," said the deputy. "There's a new house just being started about two blocks from here. Maybe I can borrow a crowbar from one of the workmen."

Left alone, Pryor could not stand being inactive. With the shovel he cleaned out the crack between the metal cover and the edge of the hole. After he had accomplished this he found a place where he could force the spade far enough into the opening to get a good purchase. With very little effort he succeeded in lifting the metal disk and uncovering the opening.

The first thing he noticed was a wheel about eight inches in diameter. It looked like the handle of a large water valve. Connected with it was a rod which ran in the direction of Webber's swimming pool. The interior of the small tank was dark, but, by holding his head sidewise with his ear almost touching the ground, Pryor was able to distinguish a striped patch of diffused light on the floor of the small tank. At right angles to this illuminated spot he made out the dim outlines of the grating.

Still holding his head in that position, Pryor turned the wheel. As he did this he saw the grating slowly slide aside until the entire opening was uncovered. As he watched, a weird, formless object flowed slowly across the oval-shaped spot of light. At first it looked like the tentacle of an octopus, except that it was the color of unflavored gelatin. It swelled and thickened and forked in a way which no tentacle could duplicate. Pryor spun the wheel until the grating was closed. Then, a feeling of revulsion coming over him, he stood up and stepped backward away from the opening. At that moment he heard footsteps crunching in the gravel behind him. With his fascinated gaze still fixed on the yawning hole in front of him, he said, "I got it open with the spade, Dillon. Be careful of that hole."

Then he turned.

The man who confronted him was not Dillon, but Victor Saconi!

The features of the Italian were distorted with fury. His teeth were bared and his eyes were almost staring out of their sockets.

"So!" he threatened in a voice which sounded like a serpent's hiss. "You insist on meddling in other people's affairs. You spurn my warnings do you? Know then that you are not going to leave this place alive!" And with that he hurled himself at Pryor.

With surprising suddenness, the Master of Mystery dropped flat on the ground. Unable to check his frenzied charge, Saconi tripped over the prostrate body of his opponent and, stumbled head foremost, right into the manhole of the secret tank.

Almost immediately his head bobbed to the surface and he clutched frantically at the edge of the opening. "Help!" he screamed. "It's got me! Help me and I'll confess everything!"

Jumping to his feet Pryor hastened to the assistance of the man who had tried to murder him. Just as he reached out to grasp Saconi's wrists, the Italian's fingers were pulled loose and his head disappeared beneath the surface.

"Help! Help!" yelled Pryor at the top of his voice. He picked up the shovel and thrust it down into the tank, probing the water in all directions without locating anything solid. Meanwhile, he continued to shout for help. In answer to his call, a score of people gathered about the open manhole. Among them was Dillon. With sweat streaming from his face, Pryor explained what had happened. Then he took charge of the rescue, sending Dillon for the tow rope and begging the others to

fetch as many rakes and hoes and boat hooks as they could lay hands on.

After twenty minutes of horror, they succeeded in getting a rope around Saconi's body and the ghastly envelope of living protoplasm that surrounded him. Willing hands dragged the shapeless mass out into the sunshine and cut the monster away from its victim. Then Malibu's excellent life-saving squad went to work with pulmotor and oxygen tank.

Saconi recovered consciousness long enough to dictate a statement in which he confessed to the murder of both Raymond and Webber, but he died in the ambulance on the way to the Santa Monica Hospital.

When the secret tank was drained, the partially digested remains of Webber's body was found. In addition, the searchers discovered a few fragments of human bones and a skull with a full set of teeth. By comparing the filling of these teeth with the X-ray photographs which had been taken a year previous, it was conclusively proved that the teeth were those of George Raymond. Thus his death was definitely established and Helen Franklin had no further difficulty in collecting his life insurance.

CHAPTER XII

Clearing Up the Mystery

AFTER the excitement had died down on that memorable day when Victor Saconi fell a victim to his own diabolical plot, Mrs. Raymond hunted Pryor up and asked, "Shall I break the postage stamp seal of that paper now?"

"Of course," he said. "Haven't you done that yet?"

She blushed as she confessed, "I didn't break the seal—but I did steam it open. You see you really had me worried. So you were just teasing me all the time."

"I'm afraid it was poor taste on my part to do that," Pryor said contritely.

"Now that it is all over I'll forgive you—but only on one condition."

"And what is that?"

"Please tell me how you happened to write Victor Saconi's name on that paper. I could have staked my life on his friendship for George. I still can't understand why he did it. Even you seemed convinced of his innocence. Didn't I see you cross his name off your list of suspects?"

"Yes. But I put it back on again as soon as I heard that Webber had disappeared. You'll have to admit that it wasn't hard to find a motive in his case."

"Of course Victor had a motive for killing Sidney, but that can hardly explain his murder of George."

"Oh, yes it can."

"How can you say that. There couldn't have been any possible connection between George and Victor's affairs with Angela."

"Of course not."

"Then what do you mean by saying that Victor's motive for murdering Sidney justified him in killing George."

"I didn't say that."

"Then what did you say?"

"I simply was rude enough to contradict your statement that Saconi's motive for killing Webber can not explain his murder of your husband."

(Continued on page 954)

The Last Earl

By Franklin W. Ryan

OUR author takes us to Roumania; the leading characters of the story are of Roumanian parentage and have strange experiences in an ancient castle. It will be found quite an absorbing production and well worthy of recommendation to our readers.

Illustrated by MOREY

CHAPTER I

THE scorching July sun was dropping into the oily swells of the Atlantic with a last vicious thrust at the sweltering world. Jack Surrey stood at the rail of the great transatlantic liner "Empress of India", gazing at the ever changing waters flying beneath him and meditating upon the events of the last few days.

He had completed his education as a physician and surgeon only four days ago, having received a degree from Clinton College, one of America's foremost medical schools.

Although he had had many friends at college, Jimmy Jassy was the most outstanding of them. He had become acquainted with Jimmy shortly after they had started their Freshman year. Jimmy had gotten into a jam over something he didn't do and Jack had helped him out of it. Since then they had been the best of friends.

Jimmy was not an American but the son of the Earl Jassy of the province of Cluj, (pronounced *Kloosh*) Roumania. Jimmy's mother had died at the time of the birth of his sister, Mary, when Jimmy was only two years of age. His father had been afflicted with an incurable disease, and for that reason Jimmy and his sister had been sent to America at a very early age to receive their education. Since that time neither of them had ever returned to Roumania. Only an occasional letter reached them from their father; and finally even these communications ceased. The children thought little of receiving no answers to their letters, since few letters had ever been written to them, and the mails were very uncertain since the war. It had been over ten years since they had received any word from the Castle Jassy.

Jimmy had received a degree in law at the same time that Jack had received his degree in medicine. The brother and sister had decided to return to Roumania, and had invited Jack to accompany them for a vacation. Having inherited a large legacy, having no reason to begin practicing as a physician at once, and having secretly fallen very much in love with Mary, he accepted.

Jack could hardly be condemned for his devotion to Mary. It would be almost impossible to adequately describe her beauty to you. Her perfectly proportioned figure, her lovely raven locks lying softly against the milky whiteness of her velvet smooth skin, her cherry red lips and captivating smile, the sparkle from the un-

fathomable blackness of her eyes, seemed to attract him to her as a magnet attracts a piece of iron.

Jack was aroused from his meditations by a light touch on his shoulder. It was Mary. She had worried when he didn't come in. The moon was high in the heavens. The stars glistened like so many diamonds on a background of velvet. A chilly breeze had sprung up. Beneath them the black waves looked ominous. They were alone. She looked down at the dark water flying past and came closer. She shivered slightly. He took off his coat and put it around her shoulders, his arms lingered and she turned her face toward his. Something irresistible in the depth of her eyes called him, beseeched him. They embraced. A lump rose in his throat and for some minutes he was speechless. At last he managed to murmur.

"Mary, I love you."

"Well, Mary, I see you've found him," a voice behind me said calmly.

They turned toward Jimmy in confusion.

"How long have you been here?" Jack questioned indignantly.

Jimmy laughed, took their arms, and together they walked into the large, brilliantly lighted salon.

Two days later they landed in Paris, stayed over night in the Hotel Continental, and the next morning boarded the trans-European express which was to carry them through the French countryside, across Switzerland, and into Vienna. Laboriously their train crossed the Alps. As they sped on their way a sinister feeling overcame Jack. He couldn't account for it but a voice inside him seemed to be telling him that he should not have come. That night in fitful, uneasy slumbers he saw a grim, horrible, distorted face.

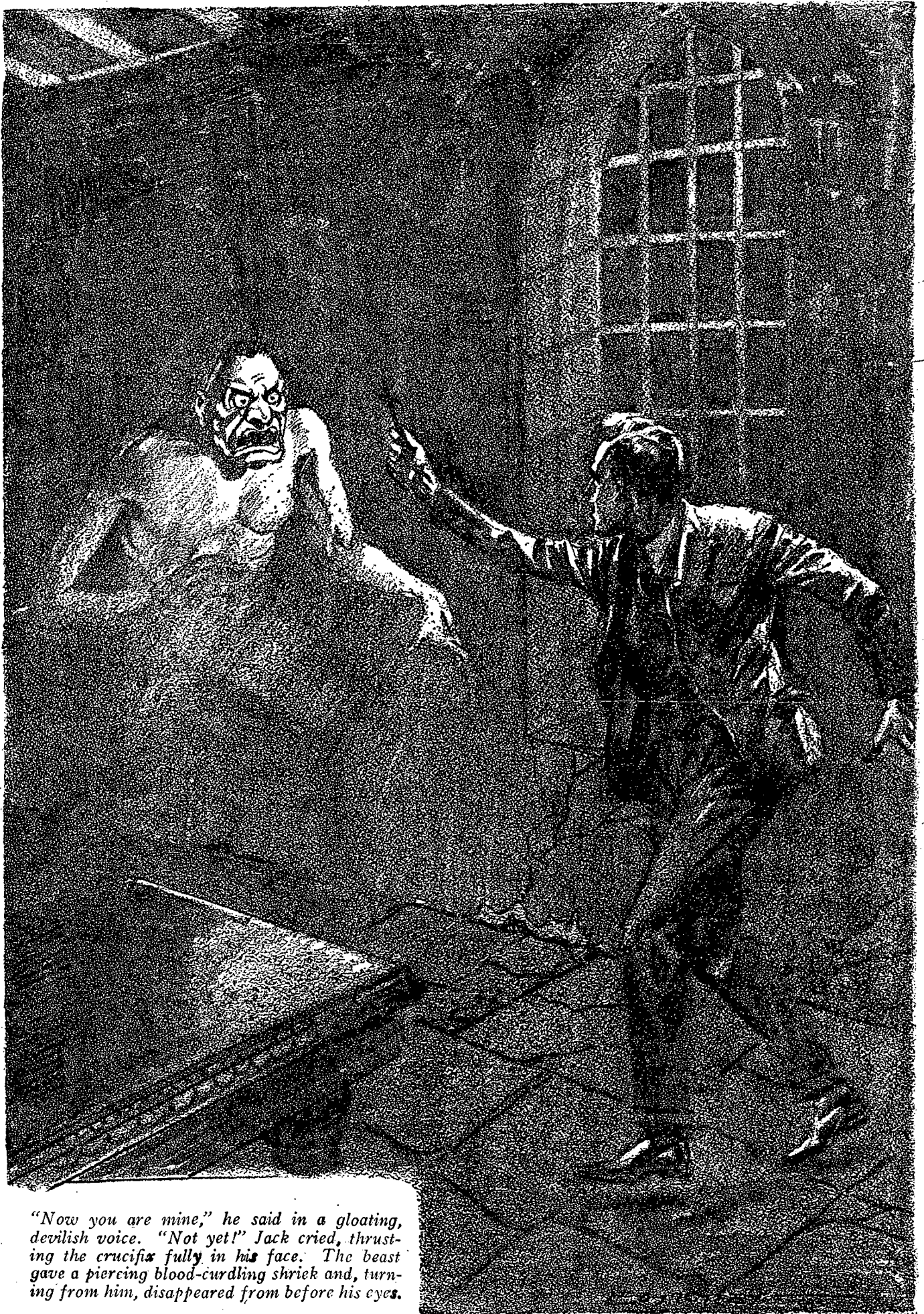
"Go back!" it said over and over again, "Go back! Go back! Go back before it is too late!"

What did it mean?

CHAPTER II

THE next morning they crossed the Swiss-Austrian border and gained speed as they dropped down into the less mountainous country of Austria and sped on their way toward Vienna.

That night Jack lay wide awake in his berth above Jimmy, thinking of his peculiar dream of the night before. Suddenly there was a terrific crash. A heavy beam from the ceiling pinned him down. Fire broke out



"Now you are mine," he said in a gloating, devilish voice. "Not yet!" Jack cried, thrusting the crucifix fully in his face. The beast gave a piercing blood-curdling shriek and, turning from him, disappeared from before his eyes.

in the car. He could see the flames, reflected against the tangled wreckage, dancing grotesquely. The train was in an uproar. Shrieks and screams from frightened or injured women and children filled the air. Momentarily a round Austrian curse, or a French condemnation of all the deities would surmount the clamor. Something heavy struck his head.

That was all he remembered of the collision, but immediately a shape appeared. He recognized the horrible, loathsome features of his dream-visitor of the night before. Again the deep, unnatural voice rang in his ears.

"There is yet time," it said. "Go back!"

As Jack returned to consciousness he was aware that he was lying on a very comfortable bed in a Viennese hospital. Mary's arms were about his neck and the velvet of her black hair lay softly against his cheek. She was convulsed with sobs and kept saying over and over again.

"Oh Jack! I love you! Please don't leave me! Oh, you can't leave me! Please don't die, Jack!"

His head throbbed dreadfully and there was a grueling pain in his back, but, after hearing her sweet voice, he couldn't have died even if he had wished to. Finally he managed to gasp:

"Mary!"

Jimmy, who was behind her, went to get the doctor.

"Oh Jack! Then you are alive! You will live for me, won't you?" Mary asked, brushing the tears from her eyes and smiling happily.

"Mary, you're wonderful. I'd do anything in the world for you." Jack answered, making a rather disheartening attempt to smile. Jimmy and the doctor entered the room.

"Ah hyes—der chentleman hass recovered consciousness. But now ve must leaff der room. He vill be hall-right in a few days," asserted the doctor in halting English.

Everyone left the room and Jack was alone. The talk with Mary had weakened him and he went to sleep again almost immediately. As he drowsed off he forgot all about the warning he had received while he was unconscious. There was no room in his mind for anything but thoughts of dear, sweet, little Mary.

Both Mary and Jimmy had escaped without injury. There had been a misunderstanding in regard to dispatch orders and an eastbound freight had failed to sidetrack for the express to pass. The two trains met at a blind curve about twelve miles east of Vienna where neither could see the other until it was too late. Jimmy had managed to drag Jack out of the upper berth after the second beam had fallen and knocked him unconscious; and they were rushed to Vienna in a special train sent out for that purpose.

The day after Jack had regained consciousness Jimmy and Mary came to his room in the hospital. He told them to go on ahead and he would follow as soon as he had recovered.

"Perhaps it would be a good idea if I went on ahead to see if everything is all right. That is if you will be O. K." Jimmy replied.

Mary came over, sat on the edge of the bed and took his hand.

"I wouldn't leave you for the world," she stated determinedly.

"Gee, old man, I'm sorry it wasn't I, instead of you, who got busted up," Jimmy declared.

"I wouldn't trade places with you for anything," Jack answered, looking at Mary who smiled roguishly.

As they went out the door Jimmy gave him a long wink of brotherly understanding.

That afternoon Jimmy left them and continued on alone to the castle. It would probably be a week or more before Jack would be able to leave Vienna with Mary.

Every day she came to the hospital, bringing him fruit, flowers, and any little trinket she thought would amuse him, to remain there all day. Having been in good health it did not take him long to recover and in two days he was able to sit up. When they were together they talked of everything; art, the trip across, the accident, but neither of them dared to mention that which was always foremost in their minds. Always before she came he would prepare himself to pop the vital question, but as soon as the door opened he developed that Miles Standish feeling and his courage sank to his boots. As the days passed he forgot everything except Mary. When he would awaken in the night he would see her sweet face before him. In his dreams she was always with him.

He was able to walk by the third day, and by the fifth he had quite recovered. That afternoon when they were seated in his room talking, the doctor entered and informed them that he would be discharged the next day. They were overjoyed and spent the rest of the day making plans for the continuation of the trip.

That night Jack had the familiar, beastly, troublesome nightmare for the first time since he had entered the hospital. The hideous, distorted features appeared.

"Look at me. Let me be an example to you," it said. "Stay away from—"

Suddenly the figure of a tall, well-built man appeared with the other horrible face in his dream. The speaker stopped abruptly and turned toward the newcomer.

"Oh master! I wasn't going to tell! Please don't punish me, master!" the former begged earnestly.

The dream faded. He awoke in a cold sweat and turned on the lights. Of course there was no one there. What did all this foolishness mean? It was getting on his nerves. By this time he had become thoroughly disgusted with himself. Angrily he snapped off the lights, turned over, and went to sleep.

CHAPTER III

THE next morning Jack was discharged from the hospital. Mary had her things packed and at noon they ate luncheon in an enticing little Austrian café. She was in the best of spirits and chattered gayly about various little happenings and experiences she had had during her stay in Vienna.

Jack undoubtedly had a number of faults, but superstition was not one of them, and, although he considered that the three dreams were very peculiar coincidences, he was inclined to treat them lightly. For that reason and for the fact that he did not wish to dampen Mary's spirit and frighten her, he didn't mention them. As they boarded the train and started on their way he couldn't help thinking of them, but as they left Vienna behind, Mary's cheerful company was irresistible and he soon dismissed them from his mind.

They reached the city of Cluj at nine o'clock in the morning, and found that it would be necessary for them to travel from it to the village of Mitra, approximately twenty miles from Cluj. They took a carriage and went

to the leading hotel to wait for the bus which was to carry them to Mitra.

At ten o'clock a large omnibus drawn by four horses pulled up before the hotel. They got in and started on their way, plunging and careening, along the crushed stone road. The city of Cluj was located in a comparatively level valley, but, as one travels further from the city, the country became rougher and perceptibly more hilly.

On the first part of the journey toward Mitra they passed through a number of picturesque little villages, but, as the omnibus lurched on, the peasant cottages became fewer and fewer, until only an occasional shepherd's hut came in view. Mary, glad to get back among her people, talked happily with them in their own language.

The little village of Mitra was built directly at the base of the huge, forbidding Transylvanian Alps. The village consisted of an inn, a little merchandise shop, and four or five cottages. The mountains were not of the type that we in America are familiar with, but a series of tall, jagged, overhanging crags which gave one the impression that they were about to tumble at any moment. These crags were of a depressing aspect, consisting of leaden-colored rock, and, as far as the eye could see, were barren of any vegetation.

The other passengers in the omnibus had been dropped along the way, with the exception of a little old woman who was coming to visit the wife of the landlord of the inn. All during the journey she had been having a terrible time with her boxes, bags and bundles, of which she had a quantity of every conceivable shape and size.

At the steps of the inn we were met by the jolly little landlord in snow-white apron and with a big moustache, brought to a sharp point on either extremity. Beside him stood his wife, a fat, smiling, motherly-looking woman, blocking most of the light which tried to come through the broad, open doorway.

Upon entering the inn we were at once taken by the air of cozy homeliness, which most of the inns of the old world impart. Suspended from the ceiling, a large lamp amply lighted the combined living room and dining room. Across the room was a large stone fireplace on the mantel of which lay all the knickknacks collected by the family for innumerable years. In the center of the large room stood a massive oak table on which a tempting repast was laid.

After eating, Mary, having been fatigued by the long journey, retired.

The innkeeper's wife took her visitor into the kitchen, probably for the purpose of exchanging the latest scandals. Jack and the innkeeper remained at the table to smoke and to discuss the various current topics of interest.

The Roumanian language is similar in many ways to Latin. Having taken that language both in high school and in college Jack could converse in Roumanian fairly well.

The talk drifted on and on, about the health of the family, the high cost of living, the change in the country since the war. Finally Jack asked if any news of the castle Jassy had been received of late. The innkeeper looked at him in surprise. Suddenly the look on his countenance changed from interest to horror. He crossed himself piously.

"A young man was here last week, who was going to Jassy," he said slowly. "I will tell you what I told him."

Painstakingly and with evident awe he related the following tale:

"My brother, my nephew, and myself started, one afternoon about a month before the war, up into the mountains to hunt raccoons. The only pass leading up into the mountains for a considerable distance around Mitra is the road leading to the castle Jassy.

"We reached the castle and passing it arrived at the timber line about ten miles above it, at eight o'clock in the evening. Soon our dog chased out a raccoon and the excited animal started to run down the road toward Mitra. We chased it for a short distance but the dog soon lost the scent.

"We hunted until about twelve o'clock and having caught two raccoons we decided to return. As we neared the castle a little shadow crossed the road in front of us. It was the raccoon that we had chased from the forest. Immediately the dog was after it. Because he was a big fellow we were especially anxious to obtain him, the three of us tumbled out of the buggy and started in pursuit. Up the long narrow path leading to the castle the dog chased him. He cornered him almost directly in front of the huge oak castle door. When we came up the animal had his back to the corner and the dog was facing him, barking viciously.

"Suddenly the castle door opened. We all stopped short, wondering who could be awake in the castle at this late hour of the night. The dog stopped barking. Quietly the figure of a tall, well-built man stepped from the doorway. I admired his splendid physical aspect, but as I looked into his face—"My God!" (He crossed himself.) "Those eyes! They seemed to sear me like a red hot branding iron. I turned away quickly.

"Casually he turned his gaze upon my nephew who looked at him a moment—half turned toward us—slowly turned back and said:

"Yes, master."

"My brother and I stood rooted with surprise and terror. The man turned and re-entered the castle. My nephew followed as though bidden, and the door closed after them.

"As soon as my brother and I had recovered we ran down the path, scrambled into the buggy, and drove with all possible speed toward Mitra.

"The young man who stopped here last week is the first one who has ever dared to approach Castle Jassy since that time. My nephew has never returned."

At the close of the story Jack sat eyeing the innkeeper critically. Such a story was so extraordinary as to be utterly unbelievable. Neither of them spoke. Startlingly shattering the silence, a long, dismal cry floated down to them from somewhere in the mountains. It seemed to chill them through and through like a cold December wind. The innkeeper looked fearfully through the open door.

"What was that?" Jack asked quickly.

"I have never heard it before," the innkeeper replied in an awed whisper.

CHAPTER IV

JACK lay awake all night wondering whether or not he should tell Mary about his strange dreams and the innkeeper's even stranger story. There were three things certain: Jimmy put very little faith in the story of the innkeeper, otherwise he would not have continued on to the castle; the European peasantry are,

to say the least, extremely superstitious; if he told Mary of the peculiar happenings and they turned out to be just coincidences, he would find himself in a very embarrassing, if not ridiculous position. At last he dropped off to sleep.

When he awoke the sun was high in the heavens, and was pouring through the window into his room and there were little pools of it on the bare, sand-scrubbed floor. Glancing at his watch he found that it was nearly eleven-thirty. As he tumbled out of bed and pulled on his clothes he laughed at his fears of the night before. He could hear the roosters crowing, the hens cackling, and all the multitudes of little, domestic sounds about him. Things looked different, more alive, in the daytime. He looked on the innkeeper's story as a fine piece of imagination on his part.

When he descended the stairs he found Mary waiting for him. They spent the rest of the morning strolling through the peaceful, picturesque little village. The houses were of clay with high, sharply slanted, thatch roofs and little English windows, very similar to the peasant cottages of Switzerland. At one end of the village was a little Greek Orthodox church. At the side of it was a graveyard. The tombstones were few and probably those of the direct ancestors of the present inhabitants of the village. At the other end of the village sat the inn, which was the only structure boasting a second story and gables.

Some of the cottages were so covered with vines that one could hardly discern the windows. Chickens were scratching in the village's only street. Little flocks of geese moving in stately processions, stopped to hiss at them when they had passed. The buxom housewives standing in their doorways smiled and greeted them. Everything seemed so homelike and peaceful, that one unwittingly forgot all his troubles and basked in romancism.

After luncheon the innkeeper and Jack went out to the stable behind the inn. He attempted to dissuade Jack from going to the castle, or at least from taking Mary with him. If he left Mary at the inn he would have to tell her the reason, and he knew that she would never stay if she thought Jimmy was in the slightest danger. Frankly, he was very skeptical as to whether there was any danger, so consequently he decided that it would be best to continue to the castle without further delay. Having made his decision known to the innkeeper and warning him not to tell Mary because he didn't wish her to worry, his host volunteered to drive them to the castle. He took a crucifix from his pocket, kissed it, made the sign of the cross and handed it to Jack.

"The power of God is greater than the power of all evil," he said earnestly.

Jack took it, thanked him, put it in his pocket, and promised to be very careful.

They loaded their traveling bags into the innkeeper's gayly painted cart and were off.

As they approached the pass, the mountains looked more glowering and sullen than before. It was about twenty miles from Mitra to the castle.

The road had evidently been the bed of some long dried-up river. The solid stone cliffs rose perpendicularly and high above them, on their side of the road; at times so high, that the road was completely enveloped in shadows. It was very obvious that at one time Castle Jassy had been a formidable fortress. Occasionally the road was reasonably straight for some distance, then it

went cork-screwing off at right angles with itself and into a series of unexpected bends and curves. Because of this it was necessary to drive slowly and the journey became very tiresome.

It was about seven-thirty when they reached the castle, and the last dying rays of the sun lit the scene only feebly. The innkeeper let them off at the foot of the plateau on which the castle was located, and refused to go an inch nearer.

The plateau on which the castle was built and the castle itself were of the same somber gray rock of which the mountains were composed. The only possible access to the castle was by way of a little narrow footpath, carved from the living rock, which wound about leading to the plateau. Laboriously Mary and Jack climbed to the level of the castle.

It was difficult to picture anyone living in this God-forsaken place, so far removed from civilization. The vast, rambling, mediæval structure seemed to forbode evil and disaster. Jack knew that Mary was affected for she gripped his arm tightly. As they approached the castle, they could see that the great stone masonry was crumbling from neglect and decay. Sides and peaks were missing from the high towers and turrets vaguely outlined against the fast darkening sky. It was no wonder that the peasantry of the surrounding territory were superstitious about it.

Jack knocked at the ponderous oak door. They waited for some minutes and at last the door creaked slowly open on its rusty, unoiled hinges. The person who admitted them was a little, bent man, faultlessly dressed in the garb of butler and carrying a candle which smoked and flickered in the various air currents which struck it. Jack thought his face had that ashen color peculiar to people in the last stages of valvular heart trouble. The eyes looked sunken, wide and staring like those of a dead person. All the muscles of his face seemed rigid. However, he attributed his peculiar appearance to the uncertain light. Mary seemed to know him for she said: "Peter! Then you are still here. Oh, it seems so good to see you again."

The man's only answer was a stiff bow. He closed the door slowly behind them. In the dim light they could see that the great hall in which they were standing was in complete ruin. Huge slabs of stone and lumps of mortar were lying where they had fallen from the once impregnable walls. The glass, which had covered the high, narrow windows, was demolished. Thick layers of dust were upon everything. A multitude of cobwebs covered every crack and crevice. Bats fluttered around above their heads. It was impossible to believe that the building had been inhabited for a number of years.

Jack could see that Mary was more surprised than he was and they both looked at the butler in astonishment. He didn't seem aware that anything was out of place, and motioned them to follow him. They stumbled after him as best they could and, curiously enough, he seemed to walk down the center of the hall as though the debris were not there.

CHAPTER V

AS they climbed the great stone stairway leading to the second floor Jack was filled with apprehension. Could it be possible that there was any truth in the story of the innkeeper? Certainly if there was any such thing as supernaturalism there could not

be a better place for it than here in the ruinous castle.

Castle Jassy was so far removed from civilization that only once in a great while could a visitor be expected from the outside world. It would take very little to frighten away the already overly-superstitious natives of the region. The innkeeper had stated that no living person except Jimmy had been near the castle since the war. The general appearance of it certainly backed him up.

Looking ahead of him Jack could not see a foot-print in the soft, thick layer of dust; not even the foot-prints of the butler. He scrutinized the steps before him more closely. No, there were no footprints there. What strange power did this little fellow have, which enabled him to defy all the laws of gravitation? Jack thought perhaps his eyes were playing tricks on him, so he whispered to Mary and, calling her attention to the strange phenomenon, asked her if she noticed it.

"Then you noticed it too," she replied in a perplexed whisper, "I thought it was my eyes in the poor light. What can be the meaning of it, Jack? I'm so afraid. Please don't leave me—ever—will you?"

He took her hand.

"Don't be afraid, Mary. Of course I'll never leave you," he answered.

At the head of the stairs the butler opened a ponderous oak door and a flood of light greeted them.

They stepped into the room and the door closed behind them. The butler was gone. They were standing alone in a great chamber lighted by many candelabra, mounted upon standards and placed about the room. The chamber was richly and tastily furnished. Great hand-carved cabinets stood about the walls. Imposing black walnut chairs were arranged in convenient positions. A massive table stood in the center of the room, and what appeared to be the remains of an evening meal was spread upon it. Great portraits done in oil, probably the ancestors of the Jassys, hung along the walls. Almost opposite the door they had entered was another door, probably leading to other rooms in the suite. One whole side of the room was an immense leaded-glass window, almost completely covered by heavy, richly brocaded drapes. The window was hidden from view on the outside by a luxurious growth of ivy. Although the moon had risen, making it almost daylight on the outside, very few of the beams filtered through the mass of large, green leaves. At the opposite end of the room was a fireplace in which a log fire was burning merrily.

On the way to the castle Jack's mind had been so full of other thoughts, that he had not noticed the chilly breezes which swept down from the mountains. He became suddenly aware that the warmth of the fire felt good. It struck him as very peculiar that this room had been so well preserved, when the rest of the castle was virtually in ruins. Mary spoke:

"Why, how odd! The room is exactly as it was the last time I remember seeing it. It is father's study."

She sat down in one of the beautifully carved chairs.

As Jack was warming his back at the fire a cut glass goblet on the table caught his eye. It was about half filled with the most beautiful red wine he had ever seen. He went to the table to examine it. The scarlet vintage was just the color of blood. He held it to the light of one of the candelabra. To his surprise instead of being transparent it was almost opaque. He smelt of it. A cold chill ran down his spine. It was blood. Mary, not

as experienced as he, didn't notice anything unusual in the color or texture of the repulsive liquor.

"Pretty, isn't it?" she said to be polite.

"Beautiful!" he returned to allay her fears.

"What kind of weird, unearthly tangle have we gotten into?" he asked himself.

Certainly the old castle itself brought one back to the days when superstition was at its height and, according to old records, all sorts of uncanny, supernatural beings peopled the earth. Could there be any vestige of truth in the old legends brought down to our modern civilization? Jack had to admit that he had seen the old butler walk through solid pieces of masonry without appearing to notice that they were there. Now he had discovered a goblet of blood with the remainder of a meal. Could it be possible that the human household had been destroyed and that now the castle was inhabited by ghosts and vampires? Such a situation was virtually impossible if not absolutely inconceivable. Mary spoke:

"I wonder where Jimmy and father are," she said, her face tinged with anxiety.

The same question was in Jack's mind but he said:

"The butler has undoubtedly gone to call them. They will probably be here shortly."

Presently they heard footsteps on the other side of the door leading to the other rooms of the suite.

"That must be they," Mary conjectured, hardly able to wait.

The door slowly opened and a man stepped in. Jack almost fell over the chair back of him. It was the man who had appeared in his last dream, and the one whom the innkeeper had described to him. His dark, well proportioned features were handsome. Remembering the description of the innkeeper he looked into his eyes. True enough, all the fires of hell seemed to burn there to horrify and fascinate the unhappy victim.

"Oh! I thought you were father, or my brother. Could you tell me where they are?" Mary asked.

The man smiled a cold, mirthless smile.

"Ah! You must be the Lady Mary, daughter of the former Lord of Cluj," he asserted.

"What! Is father dead?" Mary demanded.

"Yes," answered the man cruelly. Mary began to cry.

"Who are you?" Jack questioned.

"I am the last Earl," he replied. His voice was like ice.

Before Jack had time to reply the man crossed the room and stood before him. Jack caught his eye and began to feel dizzy. Things went spinning groggily about the room. He slumped into the chair behind him. A voice seemed to register in his brain, yet he heard nothing.

"I am your master. You are mine. You must obey me," it seemed to say, grinding, hammering, smashing into his brain, forced by a mighty will. Suddenly he remembered the crucifix the innkeeper had given him. He drew it from his pocket and held it before him. Dimly he could see the features of the monster change from a look of confidence to one of horror, of loathing. He turned away quickly and retreated. Jack lost consciousness.

CHAPTER VI

AS Jack recovered consciousness he slowly and painfully became aware that he was alone. His brain seemed numb and he had to force himself to meditate, before a thought would register. There

seemed to be a dead, prickly feeling in his head, such as one feels when a hand or foot goes to sleep, and it took considerable effort before he was able to dispel it. When he had recovered sufficiently to be able to think clearly a thousand questions, assailing his brain, clamored for solutions. Where was Mary? What had the inhuman, beastly monster done with her? Was that human blood in the goblet? It would be impossible to tell without the proper instruments for analysis. Maybe he would kill Mary, drink her blood. Jack had read in a description of vampires, from old medieval records he had found in the college library, that they were accustomed to kill their victims and draw the blood from their still warm bodies. The thought was so repulsive to him that he shuddered involuntarily. Where was Jimmy? If he were only there to help him.

Jack was a stranger, alone in an unknown castle with a weird, uncanny mystery surrounding him. The two friends nearest him were in trouble, perhaps being tortured or murdered. He must do something to help them at once, but first it would be necessary to straighten the facts in his mind. He could not disregard the old accounts of supernaturalism which modern civilization had so long considered mere superstition. Already he had seen strange happenings which science had termed impossible. Who was this strangely handsome devil? He had said that he was the last Earl. That was impossible because Jimmy was the last of the Jassy family and dead or alive he would be the last Earl of Cluj. Jack was helplessly foundering in his attempt to get to the bottom of the impossible situation in which he found himself.

The room was exactly as it was before Jack lost consciousness. He had no clue as to where the beast might have taken Mary. He must find her at once, but how, where? The old castle probably had a hundred rooms to say nothing of the towers, turrets, cellars, and dungeons. His mission looked hopeless. He grasped a lighted candle in one hand and the crucifix in the other and opened the door the monster had entered.

The door admitted him, as he had expected, into another room. This room had evidently at one time been a bedroom for he could vaguely make out the form of one of those huge, old fashioned, four-poster beds with a canopy over it. There was also a dresser, a stand, and two or three other pieces of furniture in the room. Everything was thickly covered with dust and obviously had not been in use for a long time.

Jack opened a door to his left and to his surprise found himself in what appeared to be a chemical laboratory. There were benches and cases about the walls. On the benches he noticed test tubes, retorts, flasks, and all the paraphernalia one would expect to find in such a place. He thought it very peculiar that a laboratory for the purpose of modern scientific research was to be found in an old medieval castle in the midst of a sixteenth century mystery. Here also everything was almost buried in dust, showing that nothing had been disturbed for years. The door from the laboratory led him into a long hall, with doors at intervals on either side.

By this time Jack's nerves were strained to the breaking point, and at every little sound they would tauten and his hair would seem to stand on end. Those of my readers who would condemn him for a coward must remember that after taking a long, tiresome journey through an unknown country, he had stumbled upon a strange, weird, terrifying mystery. He was hunting alone

for two friends, in a great, rambling, dark, mysterious old medieval castle, which he had never seen before and with no other light than that of a flickering candle, which threatened to go out with every draft which struck it. He was expecting momentarily to come face to face with some supernatural being.

Opening a door to his right, Jack entered a little, windowless, stone-flagged room. It was innocent of any furniture, but at one end was a narrow, winding stairway. Ascending the stairway he found himself in one of the towers he had noticed when they approached the castle. The top of the tower was missing and the masonry was crumbled, so that the highest part was not above his shoulders, and he could easily look out and see the wild, uninhabited country in every direction.

As Jack gazed at the desolate scene the thought struck him that perhaps he was the only living human being within twenty miles. Oh, why hadn't he taken the advice of the landlord? If anything happened to Mary he would never be happy again. He could not help blaming himself for bringing her here. There was a strong urge within him to jump from the tower to the débris below and end his unhappy, useless life. No, he couldn't do that. Perhaps Mary was still alive. He must save her.

With that thought in mind, he raced frantically down the stairway to the door leading to the hall. It was closed. He tried it only to find that it was securely locked. He was trapped! Escape was impossible since the only two openings were the tower and the door. To jump from the tower would mean certain death. Perhaps he could break the lock on the door. He must, it was his only chance! Setting the candle down in its own wax, he got back as far as the size of the room would permit and running, struck the door with his full weight. There was a rending crash as the lock pulled from the rotten wood and the door flew open. He landed bruised and sprawling in the middle of the hall. He still grasped the crucifix firmly in his hand.

As he painfully got to his feet, he was aware that he was standing face to face with the monster who had spirited away Mary. The cold, cruel smile on his face was more pronounced and there was a glint of triumph in his eyes. He at last was in his true form.

"Now you are mine," he said in a gloating, devilish voice.

"Not yet!" Jack cried, thrusting the crucifix full in his face.

The beast gave a piercing, blood-curdling shriek and, turning from him, disappeared from before his eyes.

CHAPTER VII

HAVING recovered his candle, Jack crossed the hall and opened the door to the room adjoining the laboratory. The door was covered with cobwebs and dust and creaked dismally as he opened it. Imagine his surprise upon finding that the room was almost completely filled with a gigantic machine. Although he knew very little about machinery he judged it to be some form of electrical generator. What its purpose was he could not guess. It couldn't be that it was for the generation of electricity for the castle, since none of the rooms were equipped with electrical fixtures. Noticing a switch on the wall by the door he pulled it. Immediately a soft green light began to radiate from the machine. The light, although not strong, was suffi-

cient to give him a very good view of the enormous contrivance.

The exterior of the machine was completely covered with a cast-iron shell. There were two metal rods running toward one another parallel to the side of the machine and held in place by clamps projecting from the side. They reminded him of the poles of a static machine which he had experimented with in college, with the exception that between them was an open-sided steel case about seven feet long by two feet wide.

Finding another switch, alongside of the one he had first discovered, Jack pulled it. The machine hummed into action. In a moment a great livid green spark flew through the metal box; for all the world like the discharge of a giant static machine, except that the electricity shooting between the poles was green instead of white.

All this experimenting took but a moment, and, as soon as Jack found that his discovery would not aid him in finding Jimmy or Mary, he turned off the switches and left the room.

He explored the other rooms along the hall. Most of them were empty but occasionally he would find the remains of what had once been a magnificent guest chamber. However, now the panes had fallen from the windows, the elements had mildewed the beautiful hangings, and dust and mildew covered the furniture.

Eventually Jack came to a turn in the hall and noticed a light through an open door at the end of it. Not knowing what he would encounter, he crept stealthily toward the door. Coming to it he peered cautiously around the door jamb. Since his former discoveries he was prepared to find almost anything. There was no human being visible.

In the center of the room was a funeral bier. On it lay an open coffin. At each of the four corners of the bier stood a large candle in a standard which brought it high above the top of the casket. As he entered the room Jack prayed fervently that the occupant of the coffin might not be Jimmy or Mary. His prayers were in vain. As he advanced fearfully to the coffin he looked with dismay upon the one whose friendship he had cherished for so long a time.

Jimmy's face was sunken and hollow and his eyes were wide and staring. His whole complexion had a bluish cast. Jack took his wrist, it was stiff and lifeless. There was no beat of the pulse. He tore open Jimmy's clothing and placed his ear over his heart. There was no action. Yes, he was dead. Jack broke down at the edge of the casket and wept. He was indeed wise who said:

"To see a woman cry is distressing, but to see a man cry is heart-breaking."

It seemed impossible that Jimmy could be lying there before him, lifeless. He was such a young man, just on the verge of his career. He was always so considerate—such a true friend. Who would ever want to harm him?

"I'll get that devil if it's the last thing I ever do alive," Jack swore fiercely.

He took one last lingering look at Jimmy's face, closed his eyes, and turned hopelessly away. Was Mary a victim of this Godless monster also?

"Oh, why couldn't it have been me instead of Jimmy?" Jack thought. "He had so much to live for; so much to look forward to."

As Jack walked toward the door with his head bowed

he ran into someone. Looking up quickly he recognized the distorted, disfigured face of the one who had come to him first and so many times afterwards in his dreams. So the devil had a helper. Jack shoved the crucifix in his face. To his surprise the new-comer kissed it and pushed it aside.

"You are the doctor who came with their excellencies the Lord and Lady Jassy, aren't you?" he asked in Roumanian.

"Yes," Jack replied savagely.

"I am the nephew my uncle mentioned in the story he told you," he said.

"Not the nephew of the innkeeper?" Jack asked open mouthed.

"Yes," he replied, "it is I. I tried to warn you in my dreams but you wouldn't listen to me. Likewise I tried to warn His Lordship but it was useless, he wouldn't listen either. Do not mourn your friend, His Lordship, he is not dead but in a mesmeric trance. However, there is only one way that you can help him; that is by obtaining the papers which will tell you what to do. We must act quickly or Cenozoic will find us. Cenozoic is the beast who rules the castle. You must go down the stairway to the hall you entered when coming into the castle. At the bottom of the stairway you will find, to your right, a door which opens into the library. Enter the library and go to the tier of shelves directly in front of you. Count up three books from the bottom and the tenth book from the left. It is the Bible. Cenozoic has not molested the papers because he does not dare to touch anything holy. You will find the answer to everything in the papers. Do not turn back regardless of what you hear or what happens. Go, and God be with you."

Before Jack knew it the nephew of the innkeeper had pushed him, dumbfounded, out of the room and into the hall.

Without further delay Jack made his way back to the room into which Mary and he had been shown. It was his only chance. He must take his word that he was the nephew of the innkeeper and must believe that what the man told him was true.

As Jack reached the door of the study, a shriek rent the air and echoed through the castle followed by a dull thud. It sent a prickling sensation down his spine. He turned to start back to where he had left the nephew of the innkeeper, but remembering his warning he opened the door and went into the room.

Jack found everything as he had left it. The candles were all burning and the fire crackled merrily. As he glanced into the chair by the table he saw a figure slumped and lifeless lying there. It was Mary.

"My God! The worst has happened," he cried.

He took her in his arms, caressed her, and called her name hysterically. It was useless. Like Jimmy she was rigid and her body showed all the signs of death. He laid her tenderly on the couch by the fireplace and, taking another candle, started out to find the library.

The stairway was covered with debris from the falling masonry but he stumbled down it as best he could. Reaching the bottom he found the door as the nephew of the innkeeper had told him he would. It was not difficult to see that the door had not been opened for a great while. He passed through the doorway. In the center of the room was a desk. The walls were lined with shelves of books. The gleam of something white on the desk caught his eye. Looking more closely he

could see that it was the skeleton of a man. At the time of death he had apparently been seated with his head on his arms resting upon the desk before him. The skeleton clung together for a moment and then, as the draft struck it, collapsed. There was a scramble under Jack's feet, as rats scampered for hiding places out of the light of the candle.

Jack went to the shelf of books before him. They were mouldy and covered with cobwebs. He counted up three tiers from the bottom and ten books from the left. He had to brush away the cobwebs in order to read the title. Yes, it was the book. He could make out the name "Libri Sacri" in Latin, (Sacred Books). Taking the volume from the shelf it fell open in his hands and he discovered yellow and time-worn papers. However, the ink was good and the writing was legible. This strange, unbelievable story was revealed to him.

CHAPTER VIII

TO the finder of this message:

I have a tale to relate which is of such an unearthly nature that I would not believe it myself, had I not had a part in this fantastic experiment.

Probably by the time you have found this missive, I shall have passed beyond, but the results of my discovery must remain after me, to harass others and to stand out as proof that the impossible has been accomplished.

My exploits will be of the utmost importance to science but you, my friend, in order to reach the outside world to deliver this account, must, if you have not already done so, pit the strength of a human being against that of a deadly, superhuman monster who is fighting to maintain his existence upon this earth.

Properly to begin my account I must take you back to the dawn of the seventeenth century, when there was no Roumania, and when all the Danubian Principalities were controlled by Turkey-in-Europe.

At this time a Danish landholder by the name of Cenozoic was driven from his castle by a superior force and was forced to find another Feudal Earldom. Consequently he led his retainers and serfs down through the great plain into what is now Cluj and, building this great castle for better defense against the Turks, proclaimed himself Earl of Moldau (Moldavia).

The Earldom of Moldau held sway until 1861, when the independent states of Moldavia and Wallachia united to form the Kingdom of Roumania. The Earl Cenozoic, eighth Earl of Moldau, refused to surrender his Earldom to the Kingdom of Roumania and swore to oppose any force sent against him. Prince Alexander I, King of Roumania, commissioned my father to lead a large force up into the Transylvanias to capture the castle.

On May 16, 1861, General Florenzo Jassy, later destined to be the first Lord of Cluj, made his camp before the castle. At two-thirty in the morning of the next day, great scaling ladders were placed against the side of the plateau at the rear of the castle. The men climbed up in single file as quickly and as inconspicuously as possible and overpowered the guard. At dawn the retainers in the towers saw before them arrayed in battle formation, and in a double line reaching nearly across the little plateau, the entire forces of General Jassy. When the dark and overhanging clouds, which had overcast the skies all night, broke away and the troops became clearly visible, they were hailed with a volley of shot and the battle was started.

All day and into the night the battle raged. It was a fierce one and both sides lost heavily. The plateau was drenched with blood. The retainers of Cenozoic were strong and determined and they held the all-but-impregnable fortress well. However, the troops of General Jassy were well trained and the best of Roumania's warriors. The general also had been wisely chosen for he was skilled in the art of warfare.

Unknown to General Jassy, a strange drama was being enacted within the walls of the castle. Two days before the attack the Earl was taken with a disease of the brain. At first his physicians thought it to be the rather unusual disease of Cerebral Meningitis but since the disease is fatal to the victim shortly after affliction and the Earl clung to life hour after hour, they discarded the theory that this was the ailment with which he was stricken.

For nearly sixty-five hours the Earl remained enveloped in the heavy stupor which had taken him almost in a second and through which the doctors were helpless to penetrate. It was almost as though he was under the influence of hypnotism, for although it was impossible to arouse him, his heart beat strongly and his bodily organs, with the exception of his brain, were functioning normally.

At about seven-thirty o'clock in the evening of the day the assault upon the castle was in progress, the Earl awoke from his stupor, got up from his bed, and, with nothing on but a long white robe, mounted the steps to the turrets and made a complete tour of the walls. He seemed to be still in a dream and walking in his sleep, for he stared directly before him, looking neither to the right nor to the left and saying nothing to his men. However, his appearance on the walls cheered his retainers and gave them new strength and confidence. He seemed to be superhumanly protected from the bullets, for, although they were whizzing all around him, none of them came near the place where he was standing. To the Roumanian troops below he made an eerie figure, outlined as he was against the fast-darkening sky and, with his long robe blowing about him in the fresh evening breeze.

Having made a complete round of the walls he descended, returned to bed, lapsed almost immediately back into a stupor, and in less than half an hour was dead.

The physicians dressed the body and placed it in the beautiful casket which the Earl had had made some time before. They carried it down into the dungeons where there is a great vault which was used for the family burial crypt. Accidentally the casket had been made air-tight and when the lid was closed and fastened it became hermetically sealed.

In the meantime the troops of General Jassy succeeded in getting near enough to the castle, so that they could bring a battering ram into play against the door. Owing to the difficulty of dragging artillery up the mountain pass and the impossibility of getting it upon the plateau no cannon had been brought. At last the strong oak door gave way and the troops stormed through it.

When the Roumanian force had become established in the castle, the retainers of the Earl Cenozoic began to lose ground. They fought well but when they heard that their master was dead, they knew that their cause was lost. After a series of individual skirmishes they retreated fighting, locking doors behind them, and es-

caped through some unknown passage into the open country, never to be heard of again.

* * *

I have always been very much interested in the supernatural. Even as a child I used to prowl about, poking in dark corners, in the hope that I might discover a ghost. But I never found one. That only added fire to my curiosity. I used eagerly to devour accounts of witchcraft and folklore which, needless to say, abounded at that time in every well-chosen library.

I was not, as was nearly everyone I met, superstitious. However, the unusual, the unearthly, held a strong fascination for me. I would listen to the peasants tell tales of witches, vampires, and spook-infested places in the surrounding country. When I was older I visited these so-called dead man's haunts. Sometimes in the daytime and sometimes at night I would make a journey to them, but never did I encounter a ghost. Often in the night, long after I had retired, I would hear some eerie sound in a remote part of the castle and getting up I would take a candle and set off to find the cause of it. Always I found it was some purely earthly sound, such as the singing of a cricket, the creaking of a door, the wind through some chink in the masonry, or water dripping through the walls in the wine cellar. One night I thought I heard steps on the back stairway and I was certain that at last I had found a ghost. Jumping out of bed and seizing a candle I rushed down the grand stairway, ran through the castle into the kitchen and arrived at the foot of the back stairway, only to find that rats had started to roll an egg up to the next floor and when they had arrived part of the way up the egg had gotten away from them and tumbled down the stairway to lie broken at my feet.

So it was, disappointment after disappointment and with each new disappointment came a keener desire actually to come in contact with a real ghost.

When I started my college course I ferretted out every work in the college library which had to deal with the supernatural. I met, too, a number of students who were as much interested in the subject as I. My wife that was to be, was one of these students.

Those of us who were mutually interested formed a club for the purpose of investigating haunted mysteries. Whenever one of us read an account in a newspaper of some haunted house or locality or of some extraordinary mystery we would immediately place the matter before the club which almost always set off to explore it.

Sometimes we traveled as far as three hundred kilometers from Vienna to explore some haunted ruin, always to find that the "ghost" was a shadow cast by the moon, a band of gypsies who had taken possession of the place for shelter, or some other purely earthly phenomenon.

I took a medical course at college and when I had received my degree as a doctor I began an extensive study of the brain. Here at last it seemed that I had found the birthplace of the supernatural, in the human mind. I studied, in connection with this branch of medicine, hypnotism and all the other methods of effecting the brain's stability.

It was at this time that I began to conceive of the elaborate, fantastic theory that was later to cause me so much sorrow.

I got my idea one day when I was experimenting with a piece of the gray matter from the brain of a person, who had died only recently and whose body was in a

remarkable state of preservation. I was examining the sample of gray matter through a very powerful microscope. The day was warm and the French windows had been opened. The undiminished rays of the sun glared through the window and struck the microscope squarely. As I gazed down at the greatly magnified membrane a strange thing happened. The matter began to glow and turn white. I examined the matter closely, attempting to discover the cause of the phenomenon. I found that by moving the microscope about I changed the appearance of the matter and at last I found that it was the rays of the sun playing upon the matter which caused it to behave in such an extraordinary manner.

The experiment led me to the theory that rays have an effect upon the brain. I immediately set to work experimenting with the various rays known at that time. I conferred with a number of scientists on the subject of rays and their effects. It took me nearly thirty years to find the rays I needed and how to make them.

(I will not bore my readers by the long and technical discourse by which the Lord of Cluj tells us how he obtained these rays. It is sufficient to say that as nearly as they can be classified they are the radium ray, the Ultra-violet ray, the Infra-red ray and some application of static electricity.)

I have left out one of the vital elements which, like the radium ray I obtained by a terrific charge of electricity, which is concentrated upon the matter from which the ray comes. The entire charge of electricity must be concentrated on an area of not more than one hundredth of a square centimeter.

I have left out, as I have said before, this vital element because I do not wish my experiment to be duplicated and all the suffering, which it has caused me, to be repeated at the expense of someone else.

This electrical discharge of tremendous voltage I obtained by means of atomic force, which I had stumbled upon in an accidental manner. This discovery has enabled me to construct in an area of three cubic meters a motor capable of exerting an available three-hundred-million horsepower, although I never dared to turn it on to more than a thousand horsepower, for fear that it would tear itself to pieces. The manner in which I developed this machine was this:

(Here again is another technical discourse which I will omit for the reason that it would bore all but the most skilled students of physics and chemistry.)

The result of my labors will be found in the machine.

(Here he gives directions to the room where the machine was kept which Jack stumbled upon.)

The principle of the machine is that the combined rays of the machine mixed with static electricity are forced from the positive to the negative electrode and consequently through a human body which is placed in the metal box between them. This box is to be hermetically sealed. The combination of rays, passing through the brain and nervous system, reconstructs and brings to life the brain cells and re-establishes the impulses through the nerves which set the organs of the body in motion and hence brings the corpse to life. I found later that by placing any solid or liquid in the box the result of forcing the various frequencied rays through it would attract it so strongly that the material lost most of its atomic attraction for itself. This would enable a person who had gone through this process to walk through an apparent solid, such as a wall, without suffering any injury.

I worked day and night on my life-machine and at last about ten o'clock on the night of July 22, 1920, the machine was completed and ready for use. My next problem was where I was going to obtain a subject for my experiment. There were two possible sources. I must either obtain a person who had died only a few moments before and whose body had not yet had time to decay, or I must find a body which had been hermetically sealed in its coffin at death. In either case the bodies would be completely preserved. The former was practically impossible because I would have to be in a hospital where public wards die and their bodies are given over to science for experimental purposes. Since I could neither move the life machine nor get such a body to the castle before it decayed, that plan was impossible. Then I must find a body which was hermetically sealed at death.

Suddenly I remembered the old legend which I have told in the first part of my account. The burial vault of the Earls of Moldau was in the dungeons. I called the butler and together we descended into the huge burial chamber. I examined the coffins one by one. They were useless because the air had gotten to them. Coming to one apart from the others I found that to all appearances it was sound. Praying that the casket might be hermetically sealed I ordered the butler to take hold of it and together we carried it up to the machine and placed it in the metal box. I turned on the power and the life-machine hummed into action.

I let the rays play through the casket and the body for about two minutes and then we took the casket from the box and I frantically tore off the lid. When the air struck it the body remained intact but there was no sign of life. It was the body of the last Earl Cenozoic.

One second—two seconds we waited. There was no motion to show that the body had come to life. We waited for what seemed ages, at last the body in the coffin stirred. The Earl opened his eyes and sat up. He was alive! Hurrah! I cried happily. —God! How was I to know that it was a living body without a soul?

Oh, those horrible, gruelling days that followed. He took charge of the castle. The servants fled for their lives, all but old Peter—he got him. As for my existence—it was a living nightmare, as I was sneaking around in dark corners like a rat.

I know little about this inhuman beast. He calls himself the last Earl. That is true, since the province of Moldavia was made a part of Roumania the title of Earl was changed to that of Lord, as it was in all Monarchical countries. By virtue of this my correct title is Lord Jassy, not Earl Jassy.

The only wish of this unearthly thing is to destroy life. He drinks the blood of bats and rouses only at night when he prowls about the castle. At the first streak of dawn he hurries off into the dungeons to sleep in his casket which he dragged down there. It is impossible to harm him for he is immaterial. He can walk through a solid wall or door. However, he has a mortal fear of anything holy. He says that he will live forever. That is all I know about him. Perhaps the old myth of vampires is not a myth but an actual truth.

Sooner or later I will fall into his power if no aid comes to me. He is my creation and I will not leave the castle until either I have destroyed him or he destroys me.

If this document is found I will be dead. There are two requests I wish to make. The first is to send this

account to doctor ——— of ——— college in Vienna. As to the second. In the room where the machine is kept you will find a box fastened to the wall in back of the door. The box is securely locked and you will find the key on page 780 of this book. Inside the box is a switch. Pull it and see that every living person is outside and well away from the castle within thirty minutes.

—My poor children. Tell them that I love them and that with my last breath I shall pray for them.

Let me say to you, Goodbye my friend. Good luck—and God bless you.

(Signed) LORD JASSY.

CHAPTER IX

THE story was, of course, entirely in Roumanian. Jack struggled through it as best he could, but the work was slow and there were long passages which he could not translate at all. However, he got the important part of the story.

When he had finished, Jack sat staring blankly at the yellowed paper in his hands. So that was what he had come up against—a vampire made by a man. It sounded unbelievable. Had he not seen the machine and come in contact with this monster, he wouldn't have believed it.

Jack looked around him. The sun was high in the heavens. It must have been nearly ten o'clock in the morning. The candle had burned down and gone out.

"So the devil was afraid of anything holy," he thought.

Suddenly an idea struck him. This experiment had shown him that nothing was impossible. He put the key and the manuscript into his pocket and went to the room above to secure a fresh candle.

The old castle looked even more ghostly in the daytime than it did at night. Great streamers of cobweb hung from the ceiling and spread over everything.

Having secured his candle and assured himself that Mary was where he had left her, Jack hurried down the stairway and through the castle in search of the passage to the dungeons. At last he found it, a narrow stairway which looked as though it might have been carved from the living rock.

Descending to the first level below the foundation of the castle, Jack found himself in what must have been the wine-cellar. The room contained numerous barrels of enormous proportions. Sealed bottles were placed about the walls on shelves. He took one of them and, breaking the neck of it, sipped a little of the wine. It was wonderfully aged and excellent. It strengthened him.

Again Jack took the stairway and began to descend. He passed the second and third levels. He must have been in the very center of the plateau.

Coming to the fourth level a repulsive, sickening stench greeted his nostrils. The floor was covered with a thick, green slime and lizards blinked up at him stupidly. The light of the candle revealed a passage, the walls of which were arched.

Passing through the damp, dank tunnel he found himself in a comparatively large room, obviously the torture chamber, for it contained a number of rusty machines and cages. He went through the room and into another passage at the opposite end. The floor of the passage was dry and his footsteps resounded on the flagstones and echoed from the cavernous vault beyond.

Coming to the end of the passage, Jack found himself at last in the burial vault of the Earls of Moldavia. The vault was lined on either side with decaying coffins and the bones rattled as the rats scampered from them in search of a more secure hiding place. He proceeded between these two gruesome rows to the other end of the vault and there found a beautifully carved rosewood casket. He opened the lid and there before him lay the last Earl. Taking the little crucifix, which he had kept in his hand continuously, he pressed it upon the forehead of the strangely handsome vampire. A slight shiver shook him and a groan escaped his lips, then in an instant his body crumpled before Jack's eyes. The casket held nothing but dust.

Jack ran through the passages, up the stairway, and through the castle. Taking the grand stairway in six steps he burst through the door and kneeling beside Mary, touched her with the crucifix. He waited a long moment and then her eyelids fluttered.

"Jack!" she whispered.

He put his arm about her shoulder and stroked her fine, soft hair.

"Yes dear," he answered.

"Oh Jack! What has happened?" she asked, clinging to him.

"There, there. Are you all right?" he returned.

"I—I think so," she replied.

"Then I will go and get Jimmy," he said.

Tears brimmed in her beautiful black eyes.

"Oh, don't leave me! He will get me!" she begged.

It took some minutes to console her, but at last he convinced her that the last Earl was dead.

Jack hurried down the hall to the room where he had left Jimmy. Just inside the door was stretched the body of the nephew of the innkeeper, stone dead. Jack touched him with the crucifix but it was useless. He had paid the price for remaining loyal to the human race.

Jack went to the side of the coffin which contained Jimmy.

Trembling he placed the crucifix on Jimmy's forehead. To his great joy Jimmy opened his eyes and sat up.

"Well what in the h—ll is this?" he cried indignantly.

That was the first time Jack had ever heard Jimmy swear.

"I will tell you everything later, only hurry," Jack replied.

Jimmy climbed gingerly out of the coffin and together they lifted the nephew of the innkeeper into it. Jack folded his arms upon his breast and placed the crucifix in his hands. Poor fellow. He had helped them much and they owed their lives to him.

When the brother and sister met they embraced lovingly and big tears of happiness rolled down Mary's cheeks. They sat down around the table and Jack told them what had happened to him. He took the story of the Last Earl from his pocket and gave it to Jimmy, who translated it in the words as given in the preceding chapter.

"Poor father!" Mary cried. "Oh, why did this have to happen?"

The two young men bowed their heads and said nothing. Jack could see that Jimmy was greatly moved and he could appreciate their feeling of loneliness. After some minutes Jimmy spoke:

"Well," he said hoarsely, "we must carry out the wishes of—our father."

Jack and Jimmy arose and, going to the room which

held the life machine, they examined the massive thing for some moments.

"What a brain he must have had," Jack said reverently.

They found the box and, pulling the switch, ran back to the great study. Jimmy picked up Mary and carried her down the stairway and through the castle. Together they hurriedly descended the plateau and started down the road toward Mitra. The sun had gone down and it was almost dark. Cloud banks in the west threatened an impending storm.

They had gotten about a quarter of a mile from the castle when there was a terrific explosion. The ground under their feet shook with the impact. Looking back they saw a huge pillar of flame mount in the fast darkening sky, and castle seemed to rise in the air.

"That is the end of Castle Jassy," Jimmy said quietly.

They kept walking down the road toward Mitra, taking turns carrying Mary. They had had nothing to eat since coming to the castle and naturally she felt faint. Jack felt that he could carry her forever like that, with her little head on his shoulder and the warm feeling of her body pressed closely against his.

When they had walked for about an hour it began to rain a cold, steady, disagreeable drizzle. They stumbled along for what seemed to be about four hours. At the end of that time they heard a rumble in the distance. As it drew nearer they distinguished it as the sound of carriage wheels on the stone roadbed. It was the innkeeper.

"I heard an explosion and coming out of the inn I saw a pillar of flame shoot up. I knew it must be the castle so I came up to see what was the matter," he explained.

They got into the carriage and on the way back to Mitra Jimmy and Jack between them told him what had happened. In a reasonable length of time they arrived at the inn where they ate the first meal they had eaten for twenty-four hours, and retired.

Two days later Jimmy, Jack and Mary bade the innkeeper and his wife farewell and started for America. They stopped in Vienna and delivered the document as Lord Jassy had requested. As soon as they had gotten into the cities where there were people and where on every hand traffic, shops and electric lights proclaimed that they were again in the world they knew, Jimmy and Mary seemed to forget the unfortunate happenings at Castle Jassy. Their spirits rose daily and by the time they had arrived in Paris, Jimmy and Mary were quite themselves again.

The next day after their arrival in Paris they boarded the S.S. Queensland for America. That night Jack and Mary found themselves alone together at the rail with an enchanting crescent moon overhead.

"Jack," Mary whispered, looking away.

"Yes?" he questioned.

"Do you love me?" she asked coyly.

He looked at her, hardly believing his ears.

"Why—er—of course," he answered.

She looked at him coquettishly.

"Would—would you marry me?"

Jack stood for a moment dumbfounded.

"Why er—ah—of course. But Mary! How did you come to ask that?" he demanded.

"Foolish!" she replied demurely, playing with his coat button, "I knew you were afraid to ask."

THE END

Omega, The Man

By Lowell Howard Morrow

THIS story has a touch of the tragic in it and touches on what Edgar Allan Poe called "The Lonesome Latter Years." The obscurer actions of the human mind are involved in its theme.

Illustrated by MOREY

THE silver airship cut swiftly through the hot thin air. The noonday sun blazed down upon it and the desert world below. All about was the solemn silence of death. No living thing appeared either in the air or on the drab, gray earth. Only the aircraft itself displayed any signs of life. The sky, blue as indigo, held not the shadow of a cloud, and on the horizon the mountains notched into it like the teeth of a giant saw.

The airship finally came to a hovering stop, then dropped rapidly toward the salt-encrusted plain. It came to rest at last on the bottom of a great, bowl-shaped hollow situated at the end of a chasm whose gray, rock-strewn sides rose in rugged terraces for miles back into the sky. In a few moments a panel in the vessel's side rolled noiselessly upward, disclosing a brilliant light, and from the interior of the airship soon appeared two figures who paused at the aperture and gazed out over the parched earth. Then without fear or visible effort—although they were seventy-five feet above the ground—they emerged from the ship and floated down to earth.

These two humans—the sole survivors of all earth's children—were man and wife—Omega and Thalma. They were burned a deep cherry by the fierce rays of the sun. In stature they were above the average man now on earth. Their legs were slender and almost fleshless, because for many centuries man had ceased to walk. Their feet were mere toeless protuberances attached to the ankle bone. Their arms were long and as spare as their legs, but their hands, although small, were well-proportioned and powerful. Their abdominal regions were very small, but above them were enormous chests sheltering lungs of tremendous power, for thus nature had armored man against the rarefaction of the earth's atmosphere. But the most remarkable parts about this truly remarkable couple were there massive heads set upon short, slim necks. The cranial development was extraordinary, their bulging foreheads denoting great brain power. Their eyes—set wide apart—were large and round, dark and luminous with intelligence and their ears were remarkably large, being attuned to all the music and voices of life. While their nostrils were large and dilated, their mouths were very small, though sensuous and full-lipped. They were entirely hairless—for even the eyebrows and the eyelashes of man had entirely disappeared ages before. And when they smiled they betrayed no gleam of teeth, for nature had long discarded teeth in the evolution of man.

The great, silver ship of the sky, now rested in a

deep pocket on the floor of an ancient sea. Millions of years, under the sucking energy of the sun and the whip of many winds, had sapped its waters, until only a shallow, brackish lake remained. Along the shores of this lake, which covered scarcely more than a hundred acres, a rim of yellowish, green grass followed the water's edge and struggled against the inevitable, and here and there among the grasses flowers of faded colors and attenuated foliage reared their heads bravely in the burning sunshine. And this lone lake, nestled in the lowest spot among the mountains and valleys which once flooded the Pacific, now held the last of earth's waters. Barren and lifeless the rest of the world baked under a merciless sun.

Now clasping hands, like children at play, Omega and Thalma approached the lake. They glided over the ground, merely touching their feet to the highest points, and finally stopped with their feet in the warm, still water.

Omega ran his cupped hand through the water, then drank eagerly.

"It is good," he said in a low, musical voice. "And there is much of it. Here we may live a long time."

Thalma laughed with sheer joy, her large, red-rimmed eyes aglow with mother light and love.

"I am glad," she cried. "I know that Alpha will be happy here."

"It is so, my love, and—"

Omega checked and stared out over the glassy lake. A spot in its center was stirring uneasily. Great bubbles rose to the surface and eddied to one side, then suddenly huge cascades of water shot into the air as if ejected by subterranean pressure. As they stared in silent astonishment the commotion suddenly ceased and the surface of the lake became as tranquil as before.

"There is volcanic action out there," said Omega fearfully. "At any time the ground may open and engulf the lake in a pit of fire. But no, that cannot be," he added, staring at Thalma an odd light in his eyes. For he suddenly recalled that no volcanic action or earth tremor had disturbed the surface crust for ages.

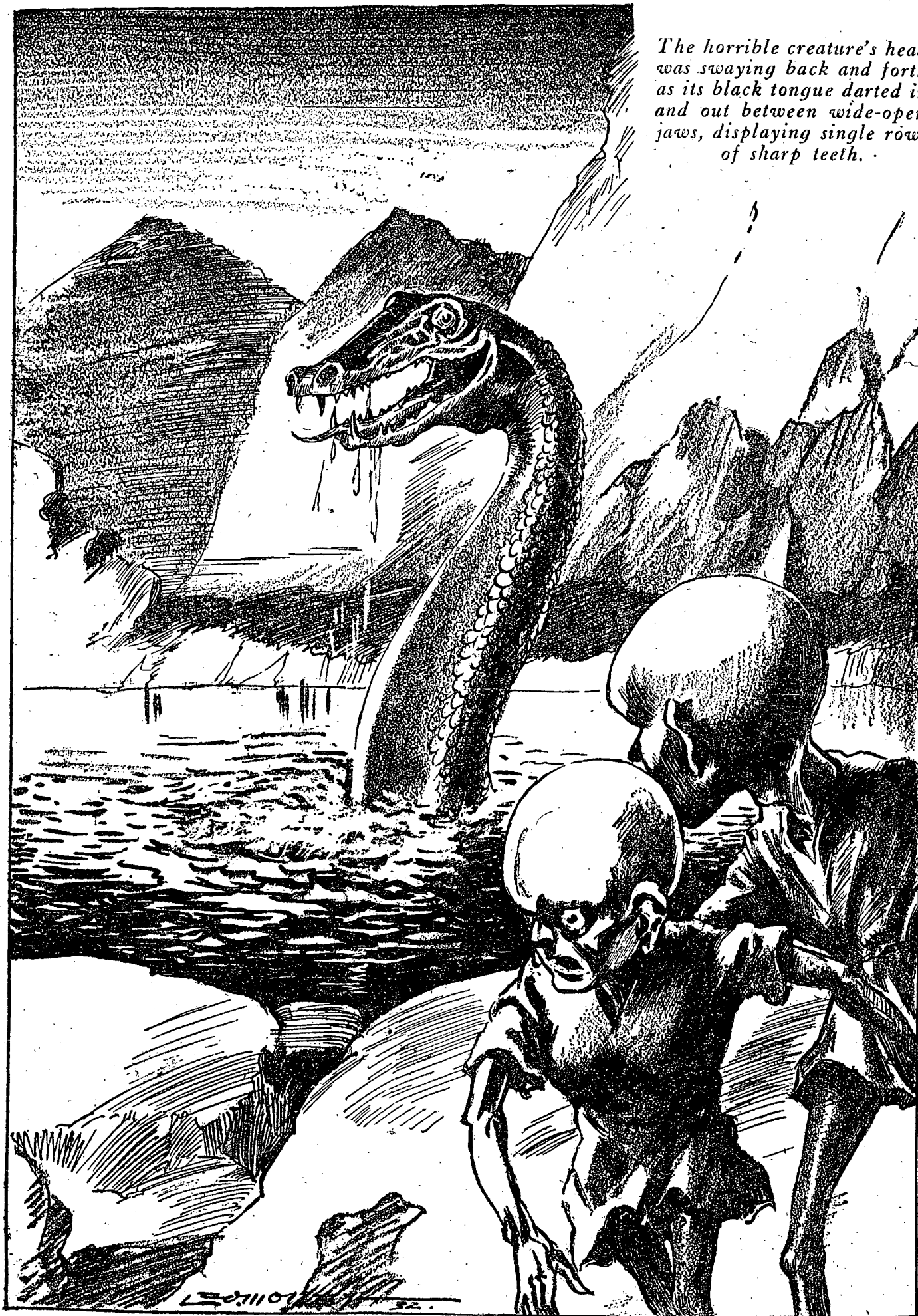
"What is it, Omega?" she whispered in accents of awe.

"Nothing to fear, my dear, I am sure," he replied, averting his eyes. "Likely some fissure in the rock has suddenly opened."

And then he embraced her in the joy of new-found life. For long ages mind had communicated with mind by telepathic waves, speech being used for its cheer and companionship.

"We will make ready for Alpha," said Omega joy-

The horrible creature's head was swaying back and forth as its black tongue darted in and out between wide-open jaws, displaying single rows of sharp teeth.



fully. "In very truth he may be able to carry on. Moisture may return to earth, and it is more likely to return here than elsewhere. Remember what the Mirror showed last week over the Sahara plains—the makings of a cloud!"

They cheered each other by this remembrance how just before they had consumed the last of the water in their recent home and buried the last of their neighbors and friends the reflecting Mirror had brought a view of a few stary wisps of vapor above the Great Sahara which once had been reclaimed by man, where teeming millions in by-gone ages had lived their lives.

"The inclination of the earth's axis is changing as we know," he went on hopefully as they turned back toward the ship. "The moisture may come back."

His was the voice of hope but not of conviction. Hope, planted in man's soul in the beginning, still burned brightly in these last stout hearts.

Alpha was still unborn. Omega and Thelma had willed a male child. In him was to be the beginning of a new race which they hoped with the aid of science would repeople the earth. Hence his name, the first letter of the Greek alphabet, of which "omega" is the last.

"I am afraid, my love," said Thelma, looking back over her shoulder at the placid lake. "I wonder what heaved the water about that way."

"Don't worry about it, my dear," he said as they paused beneath the ship and he put his arm protectingly about her. "As I have said, it probably was the shifting of a rock on the bed of the lake. It is nothing to worry about, and I feel that we have nothing to fear for a long, long time. And we have so much joy to look forward to. Remember Alpha is coming, and think of his glorious future! Think of his changing all this!" And he swept his hand toward the grim, gray hills. "Just think of again gardenizing the world!"

It was indeed a dreary view upon which they gazed. On every side, upon the mountains and hills, over salt-encrusted plains and upon the rocks, were the skeletons and shells of departed life. Fossils of the animal and the vegetable kingdoms greeted one on every hand. Great fronds of palms of the deep, draped with weird remains of marine life long extinct, stood gaunt and desolate and rust-covered in the hollows and on the hills. Long tresses of sea weed and moss, now crisp and dead as desert sands, still clung in wreaths and festoons to rock and tree and plant just as they had done in that far-off age, when washed by the waters of the sea. Great forests of coral, once white and pink and red with teeming life but now drab and dead, still thrust their arms upward, their former beauty covered and distorted by the dust of the ages. Whales and sharks and serpents and fish of divers species' and sizes, together with great eels and monsters of the deep, lay thickly over the land, their mummified remains shriveled by the intense heat, their ghastliness softened by the ashes of the years.

Millions of ages had rolled away since the struggle began—the battle of life on earth against the encroachments of death. And now death stalked everywhere, grinning with malicious triumph, for he had but one more battle to fight. Already his grisly clutch was closing on the standard of victory. Man had mastered life but he had not conquered death. With the magic wand of science he had reached out into space and viewed the life of far-off worlds. He had routed superstition and fear and selfishness. He had banished disease and learned all nature's secrets; had even visited other

worlds and had come to know and understand his God, but still death had marched grimly on. For even the abysmal moment of creation had marked the world for his prey. Slowly but surely death had closed his cold hands about the earth. The sun flung forth his hot rays and drew more and more of the earth's moisture and dissipated it in space. Gradually the forests vanished and then the streams and lakes dwindled and disappeared. By this time the atmosphere had thinned almost imperceptibly—and only by the aid of his scientific instruments had man been able to detect its thinning. Less and less rain fell, and finally even the ice-caps about the poles trickled away. Cold and gaunt and shadowy those regions lay silent and lifeless throughout the long nights, and loomed like gray ghosts in the hushed light of the summer. The sun blazed on relentlessly and the shores of the seven seas receded age after age, but with his science and his machines man had doggedly followed the retreating waters, husbanded and harnessed them and thus retained his grip on life.

But now at last life on earth had come to its final battlefield. The plans of the battle were sharply drawn, but there could be no doubt of the issue. No one knew this better than Omega, for the sun shone on with undiminished power. Yet the rotation of the earth had slackened until twenty-five hours constituted a day, while the year was 379 days and a fraction in length. Man, gradually adjusting himself to the new conditions and environment, had triumphed even in the face of a losing fight. For he had learned to smile into the hollow sockets of death, to laugh at the empty promises of life.

Back in their ship Omega and Thelma gazed out over the dead world, where the salt crystals gleamed and sparkled in the sunshine.

"Will all this ever become green again and full of joy and life?" asked Thelma wearily.

"Why not?" asked Omega. "Although the race has come to its last stand, water is here and before it is gone who knows what may happen?"

Omega spoke only to please his wife, for well he knew in his heart that the star of hope had forever set. And always he was thinking of that commotion in the waters of the lake. What could have caused it? What did it portend? He was sure that the answer was to be one of tragedy.

"We know that for uncounted ages the world was green and beautiful, was vibrant with life and joy," he went on. "And why may it not be so again, even though now it is garbed in the clothes of the sepulchre? Let us trust in the power of our son."

Thelma did not answer, and Omega, seeing that she was terribly depressed, fell silent. So they sat in their great airship, strangely dejected despite the close proximity of the life-giving water, while the sun flamed through the cloudless sky and set in a crimson flood beyond the lifeless plains. Night fell but still they sat brooding. The stars shone out in the purple heavens, but they noticed not their glory. The ship was wrapped in an awful silence. No night wind whispered its message nor warmed the cold, desolate earth, stretching down from the poles, nor cooled the hot wastes about the equator. The naked mountains rose stark and forbidding into the sky, which hung like a great, bejeweled bowl over the sun-scorched plains, where the dust of many ages lay undisturbed. The shadows lay deep and dark over the valleys and among the streets of cities dead and silent for many ages, and searched out deep chasms

which when the world was young had felt the surge of the restless seas. No form of life winged its way through the darkness and called to its mate. No beast of prey rent the air with its challenge. No insect chirped. No slimy shape crawled over the rocks. Dark and solemn, mysterious and still, the earth sped on through the night.

Morning found them in much better spirits. Over their breakfast, which consisted almost wholly of food in tablet form, they discussed their plans. After which they went to the lookout in the bow of the ship and gazed out at the gray world. There was no change. The same heart-breaking monotony of death confronted them. But despite it all they finally smiled into each other's eyes.

"It is home," said Omega proudly. "The last home we shall ever know."

"My God, look!" suddenly gasped Thalma, clutching his arm and pointing a trembling finger toward the lake. "What—is that?"

Following her gesture he stared in terror and stupefaction. Rising above the center of the lake where the day before they had beheld the agitated waters, was an enormous, scale-covered neck surmounted by a long, snake-like head whose round, red eyes were sheltered beneath black, horny hoods. The horrible creature's head was swaying back and forth as its black tongue darted in and out between wide-open jaws displaying single rows of sharp teeth. Fully fifteen feet above the lake the awful eyes looked toward the land. And as the neck moved in unison with the swaying head the scales seemed to slide under and over one another a perfect armor for the neck.

"A plesiosaurian!" exclaimed Omega, leveling his glasses at the beast. "No—how can that be?" he added in bewilderment. "Those monsters were supposed to be extinct ages ago. And they had a smooth skin, while this thing has scales, like those of a brontosaurus, which was really a land animal. This must be a cross between the two that through the process of evolution has been developed. Anyway it is the last of the species and it has come here—to die."

"Like us it has followed the water and come here to die," said Thalma as she also leveled glasses.

For several minutes they watched the swaying head which every little while twisted from side to side, as the blazing eyes seemed to be searching for prey, while a whitish saliva dripped from the jaws. The body of the beast, which they knew to be enormous, was hidden beneath the water, but the agitation on the surface showed that powerful feet and legs were stirring uneasily.

"Yes, it has come here to die," repeated Omega, "to fight for the last drop of earth's water. It now has possession of the lake, and unless we kill it, it will kill us or drive us away."

Almost with the words Omega seized an atomic gun and pointed it at the brute's head. But before he could sight the weapon and pull the trigger the monster, as though sensing danger, suddenly jerked down its head and a moment later it had disappeared beneath the surface.

"It has gone!" cried Thalma. She was trembling as with a chill, and her eyes were wide with terror.

"It will appear again," said Omega, "and then we will kill it, for the water belongs to man. Doubtless that huge beast is all that remains of life on earth save ourselves. To-night while you sleep here in the ship, I will take a gun, take position behind a rock on the shore of

the lake and watch for its appearance. I think likely after nightfall when the rocks are cool it leaves the water and comes on land in a vain search for food, for beyond a doubt it has devoured everything in the lake, save marine mosses and the like. Yet as it has survived all contemporary life except man, it may live for centuries unless we destroy it."

"But there are not centuries of water out there," Thalma said. "As to your hunting this monster alone, I will not hear of it. I shall go with you. Together we will destroy this menace of our new home."

All Omega's eloquence could not dissuade her. So, after the sun had set and the dry cold had chilled the hot rocks, they set out along the shore of the lake and looked eagerly out over the still water for a sight of their enemy. Nothing disturbed the silvery surface of the water. Crouching behind a mass of coral they waited, but throughout the long, still night they watched without reward, for nothing moved within their range of vision. The stars, wonderfully large and brilliant in that rarefied atmosphere, seemed to be the only link between them and the unknown. Only their own hurried breathing and the muffled thumps of their wildly beating hearts broke the silence. And as the sun rose again above the dead plains, weary and discouraged they returned to the ship.

While keeping up a bold front for Thalma's sake, Omega's heart was sad, for he well knew that unless they could vanquish that marine monster they were doomed. That such a dreadful creature had come to them from the mists of antiquity, as it were, was incredible. Yet he had seen it, Thalma had seen it, and it resembled some of the sea monsters he had heard of in the past. They could not doubt its existence and must prepare for the worst.

Omega's name had been conferred on him by an ironical whim of fate. When he was born there were still many people on earth inhabiting the low valleys of the Pacific's floor where much water still remained. But the droughts had increased with the years, and before Omega had reached middle-life all rain had ceased to fall. The atmosphere became so rare, even near the ground, that it was difficult for the people with the aid of their machines to draw sufficient oxygen and nitrogen from it to prepare the food which had been man's principal sustenance for ages.

Gradually the weaker peoples had succumbed. But the remnants of the nations gathered about the receding waters, all foreseeing the end, but all determined to defer it as long as possible. There was no recourse. For ages before Omega was born the nations, knowing that the earth was drying up, had fought one another for the privilege of migrating to another planet to fight its inhabitants for its possession. The battle had been so bitterly contested that two-thirds of the combatants were slain. By the aid of their space-cars the victors colonized other planets in our solar system leaving the vanquished on earth to shift for themselves. There was nothing for them to do but to fight on and await the end, for no space-car that man had ever devised was able to penetrate the cold, far-reaches of space. Only among the family of our own sun could he navigate his ships. And now, like the earth, every member of that once glorious family was dead or dying. For millions of years, Mars, his ruddy glow gone forever, had rolled through space, the tomb of a mighty civilization. The ashes of Venus were growing cold. Life on Mercury,

Jupiter and Saturn already was in the throes of dissolution, and the cold, barren wastes of Uranus and Neptune always had forbidden man.

So it seemed that the name, Omega, had been fittingly bestowed. More than ever the stark truth made him shudder with apprehension, and he felt that only the coming of Alpha would give him strength to carry on.

"Now we must make ready for Alpha," said Omega, even while thoughts of the sea-monster chilled his heart. "We will make our servants prepare the way. Here in this valley must be born a new race of men. Life must come from death. Come, Thalma."

She smiled back at him, reassured by his confident manner, and together they entered a lower compartment of the ship. This compartment contained the servants of which Omega had spoken—divers machinery and other marvels of man's construction. Omega touched several buttons and a section of the ship's hull rolled aside. He pressed other buttons and whirled wheels. Then great sections of mirror slid out into the air and without apparent direction or control they ranged themselves far up on a steep hillside. Yet all were under perfect control. With invisible, atomic rays Omega made all do his bidding. For countless centuries man had mastered the atom, divided it, harnessed its electrons. Following the discoveries of the great French scientist, Becquerel, man had learned that the potential energy of all atoms—especially that of radium—is almost limitless. And as the disintegration of the atom carries an electrical discharge, man had learned to control this energy. Omega's machines, utilizing atoms from everywhere, even the ether, split them by radio-activity through electromagnetic waves, and utilized the energy of their electrons which always move in fixed orbits. There being forty radio-active substances, Omega took advantage of them all, and equalizing the atomic weight of the atoms—whether those around a hydrogen nucleus or a helium nucleus—he broke the atoms down and directed the charges of their electrons. Then his motors amplified the discharges and, through the medium of an electric current, projected them in the form of invisible atomic rays which he could control and direct against any object and sustain and move at will by means of oscillating currents.

Soon upon the hillside, perfectly arranged and adjusted, appeared a giant, parabolic, refracting mirror with which he could obtain a view of any portion of the earth's surface by sending vibrating currents around the world and reproducing impressions already recorded on the ether, on the surface of the mirror. And beneath its center was a receiver, through which he might have heard the minutest sound around the world, had there been any to hear.

The small, atomic motors—which drew their energy both from hydrogen nuclei, the ether of space and the radio-active substances of all metals—now were placed on the hillside near the great mirror. There motors were capable of creating and focusing light, without bulb or other container, whenever and wherever needed. All were operated with scarcely an effort on Omega's part.

In a measure it seemed strange that the Greek alphabet and all the classics of the ancients had survived antiquity. But the latest inventions of man explained it all. For man with his machines had reached far back into the shadowy past and proved the immortality of all thought and action. All the records of history, all the triumphs and defeats, the joys and sorrows and aspirations of

humanity, came out of the past and marched across the screen of his historical recorder. As nothing is ever lost, all sounds and impressions occurring on earth since the dawn of its creation, being already impressed on the sensitive plastic and all-pervading ether, the same as a photograph is recorded on its film or plate, man had developed a machine for drawing on these impressions until at will the history of the world was before him. Even the varied life of the ancients came out of the past. Saints and sinners, slaves and masters mingled. Confucius sat before him in humility; Guatama counseled his followers to be humble; Christ died upon the cross. Warriors and statesmen shouted their triumphs and bewailed their defeats. Philosophers expounded their wisdom and Socrates drank the hemlock. Hannibal and Caesar and Alexander fought their battles, and Napoleon marched gory and unafraid from Austerlitz to Waterloo. All came back at the call of Omega's science.

As has been stated it was a giant craft on which Omega and Thalma had come to this last retreat of man. Within its interior were all the latest marvels of man's ingenuity and skill. These instruments of almost supernatural power not only reached back into the past but also penetrated the future. There was a great atomic-electric motor used in creating and controlling climate as long as there was any to control. Sending forth electromagnetic waves it massed and directed the atmospheric pressure, sending heat waves here, cold ones there, thus causing droughts and rainfall at will. But now, as with the case of most of the other machines, Omega needed it no longer. He kept it because it linked him with the joy of the past. Besides, there was the mind-control appliance by whose aid man's mind might visit other worlds. This was done through the development of the subconscious and the discipline of the will. But Omega was weary of these pilgrimages, because his body could not perform those far-off flights. As time went on he realized that the earth was his natural home. Even the earth's neighbors, dead and dying, offered him no haven.

Yes, Omega and Thalma had garnered the gist of the world's treasures before commencing this last trek. Gold and precious stones were common objects to them, because for countless ages man had made them at will, but around those they had brought clustered sacred memories of loved ones gone before. The biological machine in the chemical laboratory of the ship—the machine that brought forth life from nature's bountiful storehouse—was of little use now that both atmosphere and moisture were nearly gone. Yet Omega cherished this machine, and aside from its associations with the past, it held for him a fascination that he could not understand.

Having set the mirror and other mechanical servants in position, Omega and Thalma returned to the ship, and slept throughout the day, for with the descending sun they must again go forth to hunt that scaly demon which had taken possession of the earth's last water.

The night was moonless, but the bright starlight brought all objects into plain relief against the dark rocks. Taking position on the slope several rods above the beach, Omega and Thalma watched the lake eagerly, but nothing disturbed its mirror-like surface. As on the preceding night the awful silence appalled them—even though they were accustomed to the vast solitude. It was so calm and still, so full of death and mystery, that it seemed they must cry out in the agony of their emotions. As the very silence was crushing their spirits so the knowledge that only one form of life on earth

stood between them and the water to which their last hope clung, was maddening. How they longed to battle the hideous monster! But the hours dragged on with nothing to disturb the dead, heart-breaking silence. At last the Great Dipper had swung so far around that dawn appeared. Yet there had been not a ripple on the lake. Omega concluded that his guess was wrong—the beast did not leave the water at night to search for food. Perhaps it had learned the futility of such a search in a dead, dust-covered world.

Wearied by their long and fruitless vigil they must have dozed, for suddenly Omega, who sat but a yard or two from Thalma, was aroused by a padded footfall and the exhalations of a noisome breath. Looking up he was horrified to see the monster towering above him, its head swaying gently to and fro, as its great, awkward feet sent it lunging forward and backward for many feet, its spotted, scale-covered body trailed over the rocks. By suddenly rounding the shoulder of the rock, sheltering Omega and Thalma, its head held high, it seemed not to have seen the two humans, for its terrible unblinking eyes were fixed ahead on the water. However, Omega, paralyzed with fear and astonishment, and being directly in the beast's path, believed that his hour had come. This was to be the end of all his plans—to be crushed by the enormous weight of the monster which challenged his right to live. But in that tense moment when he thought that it was all over, the lithe form of Thalma reached his side and in a frenzy of terror pulled him away. But even then the sloping belly of the on-rushing beast tore him from her frail hands and dashed him against the rock.

While he lay there stunned and unable to move, Thalma discharged her weapon at the monster. Three times she fired in quick succession but the shots went wild, and in another moment the great brute struck the water with a resounding splash and disappeared from view. For a few minutes a trail of surface bubbles marked its rapid course toward the lake's center, then all was motionless and still as before.

"Are you hurt, Omega?" Thalma cried anxiously, kneeling by his side.

"Just shaken up a bit," he returned, sitting up with an effort. "Great hunters are we," he went on with a laugh. "We almost allowed the game to catch the hunters! Well, let's go back to the ship. We'll get him next time."

But their narrow escape had shaken their nerve. All day long they remained safely in the ship and kept their guns trained on the lake hoping that the beast would show himself. How or when it had left the lake they could not surmise, but that it was more formidable than they had thought now seemed certain, and Omega concluded to bring science to his aid. In this way he was sure that he would soon exterminate the monster.

So the next day he lay a cable carrying a high voltage all around the lake and connected it with traps of various designs both in the water and on the land. No more would they risk their lives hunting the beast in the open after nightfall.

The hot, still days that followed were anxious ones for these last children of life. Not a trap was sprung. The beast did not drag his slimy body and tail across the heavily charged cable. The last of his kind, fighting the last battle of existence, it seemed that nature had endowed him with uncanny cunning. There was the life-giving water for whose possession no human kind challenged them, but this enemy was more terrible than any

man, savage or civilized whom the earth had ever known.

During these anxious, watchful days Omega and Thalma went often to the mirror and gazed into it in search of vapor clouds. And more than once those gossamer-like formations appeared over different parts of the world to gladden their hearts only to fade away before their vision. The reflections of those embryo clouds became less frequent as the days wore on. Omega and Thalma knew that they had no right to hope for the return of water vapor. Their instruments, so finely attuned as to appear endowed with intelligence, the records of the past and their own common sense told them that. But nature and life in the upper reaches of the air were dying as hard as their own hope. They knew that the aerial manifestations they witnessed were but symptoms of the death struggle. And yet a real cloud, dark and pregnant with moisture, suddenly appeared in the mirror. Consulting the chart they saw that it was hovering over a great land of plain and mountains which formerly had been a part of the United States of America.

"We will go and examine this gift from heaven," said Omega. "It moves over a once beautiful land, which, the voices of history tell us, harbored a race of the free millions of years ago."

"Yes, we will go," agreed Thalma. "It may be after all that Alpha will first see the light far from this dreadful hollow and—and—that monster out there in the lake."

Omega hung his head. Well he knew that the presence of the monster was slowly killing his beloved. She complained not, but her dreams were disturbed with frightful visions, and often Omega awakened to find her at a window staring out over the lake with terror-stricken eyes.

This new cloud was thousands of miles to the east, but with fond anticipations they entered the ship and plunged toward it. But although they reached the spot in one hour, the last remnant of vapor dissolved before their eyes, and they turned sadly homeward, once more beaten by the inexorable decrees of fate.

So having decided at last that this deep valley must remain their home forever, Omega looked about for a suitable building site, for although the ship was safe and comfortable they longed for a home on the earth. But the ever present menace of the sea-monster saddened them and filled them with misgivings, despite the fact that Omega could guard the cottage electrically. But Omega wondered whether electric safeguards would keep this creature from coming some night to the cottage and sticking his loathsome head in at door or window! Omega shuddered at the thought, but refrained from mentioning such a possibility to Thalma.

Having selected a site under the branches of a great coral tree standing within the shade of an overhanging rock, Omega erected a cottage. It took him but a few days to build and furnish this building from supplies on the ship. It was complete in every feature, even to running water from the lake. Grass was brought from the lake and a lawn laid out about the cottage in the shadows of the rock. The grass was kept watered for Thalma's sake, even though the water was needed for other purposes and the lake was diminishing steadily. But she was sacred in his eyes—she the last mother the old earth ever was to know.

The interior of the cottage was embellished like a palace, for treasures were brought from the airship to

grace its walls. The richest rugs, curtains, tapestries and silks the world had ever known were there for Thalma's pleasure and comfort. Paintings of green verdure, of forests and plains of waving grass, of tumbling mountain streams and cool, placid lakes, Omega drew from the young days of the earth. The power to portray nature's moods and beauties had increased in many men with the passing of time. He placed these scenes before Thalma's couch that their cool and inspiring presence might comfort her while she awaited the coming of the child.

One morning being weary of the stark monotony of the valley, whose eastern wall was distant many miles, Omega and Thalma determined to scale the heights above. For sometimes in the sinister aspect of the chasm's walls, it seemed that the rocks would close together and crush out their lives. They concluded not to take the air-car, but to go on a rambling picnic with the ever present hope that they might discover another oasis of life.

Hand in hand they rose into the air, up and up for miles past frowning cliffs and dark caverns, yawning like grinning skulls above the outposts of death. There was no visible effort in their flight. They but took advantage of nature's laws which man had long understood. At last on the highest peak they paused to rest on a dust-covered rock.

The red sun rose above the cheerless horizon and blazed on them from a deep azure sky slashed across by bars of purple and gold. More than nine miles beneath them spread the deep gorge, where nestled their little home, looking like a doll-house, and above it shone the great, silver ship. The lake shone like a speck of silver on the drab rocks. They gazed down upon it in an attitude of worship, for it alone in all that vast realm of peaks and plains and valleys symbolized life. Then suddenly a dark speck appeared on the surface of the lake. Omega looked at Thalma apprehensively, for well he knew the meaning of that speck. Her face was pale and drawn, and she clung to Omega as they pointed their glasses at the water.

The monster was again disporting himself. He threshed the water into foam with his long, sinuous body, while his head wagged and his terrible eyes looked toward the land. It was the first sight they had had of him since the night he almost killed Omega.

"Look!" breathed Thalma, "it is coming ashore. Oh, I did hope that it was dead!" And trembling violently she clung closer to her lord.

"Never mind, dear," consoled Omega as he watched the great beast waddle toward the shore. "We will get him this time," he went on exultingly. "Watch—he is going to get into the trap!"

But they were again doomed to disappointment. Within a few rods of the shore, with its great, spotted body nearly all out of the water, the monster stopped, lifted its head and looked slowly around in every direction. Then apparently scenting danger, it turned, floundered back to the center of the lake and submerged.

"I—I—am afraid," shuddered Thalma.

"There is nothing to fear," reassured Omega. "The beast cannot get to our home, and one of these days he will either get caught in a trap or we will get a shot at him."

Although Omega spoke bravely he was really worried about the beast and the influence it was having on Thalma. He realized that he must at once devise a

better method of extermination. Even though he did not fear it so much personally its presence was disturbing, and it was daily absorbing so much water needful for themselves.

This great gash in the earth's crust stretching for many miles below them had been the deepest part of the Pacific Ocean when its blue waves still lapped the shores of continents, and that little lake, far down in the earth's bosom, was the pitiful remainder of that once mighty sea. Far to the north-west, showing plainly against the sky in the focus of their binoculars, were great ridges of mountain and table land, rising gaunt and desolate from the ancient bed of the sea—the site of the ancient empire of Japan. Round about them on every hand were the mute remains of marine life, for the spot where they sat had been far below the surface of the sea. Silent, mysterious, hopeless and dreary, the prospect appalled even their stout hearts. How they yearned for the sight of some living thing there upon those high peaks. Silence supreme and dreadful, in which even their voices, hushed and tremulous, sounded profane, cowed them by its unending solemnity and the relentless grip. Gray and nude save for their pall of dust the mountains rose into the sky, eternal in their ghostly majesty. And the dark valleys between with their gray lips of death looked like the gaping mouths of hell.

"Death! death! eternal and triumphant death, thou art everywhere!" cried Omega, springing up and gazing with hopeless eyes about over the desolation.

Thalma rose and touched his arm. A smile of faith and confidence shone on her face. He looked at her in wonder.

"Nay, death is not everywhere," she reproved gently. "Remember Alpha, our son. In him life does and will live again."

"Forgive me," Thalma," said Omega, taking her in his arms. "You speak truly. With your loyalty and courage I know we will win."

And so as it had always been from the beginning of time, even so in these last days it took woman's love and devotion to sustain man.

Now Omega gazed around on the abode of death with an expression of disdain. He challenged it and dared it to do its worst. Life still triumphed, for he had Thalma and Alpha was coming soon. He would not surrender. He would fight the dark forces of death—even that horrible monster down there in the lake—and conquer them all. He would again 'gardenize' the world. The stubborn power of hope, that heritage from his atavistic ancestors, was surging through his blood.

"We will change all this," he went on, waving his hand toward the far rim of the sky. "We are still masters of life. But now let us descend," he added in answer to her approving smile.

So saying again hand in hand they stepped off into space and floated easily down toward their last home.

Omega knew that his first important task was to get rid of the beast. The fear-haunted expression in Thalma's eyes brooked no delay. Accordingly they went to the ship, and each taking a small sack they filled them with depth bombs. Thus armed they floated out over the lake in quest of their enemy. But although quite shallow the water was opaque for the most part being discolored by vegetable matter stirred up by the monster, and the transparent portions were too deep for them to see bottom. Long and carefully they searched at a safe distance above the water, but no sight of the beast could

be seen. Then hoping that a chance shot might reach and destroy him they passed to and fro over the lake's center and dropped their bombs. Great columns of water were sent high in air deluging them with spray. That was all. Still, they had no way of knowing whether a bomb had struck home. In spots the water was so violently agitated as to suggest that the monster writhed in a death struggle. But at last all became as quiet as before.

It now occurred to Omega to surround the lake with an invisible wall of electricity of such power as to electrocute the beast should he attempt to go over or through it. This was accomplished by increasing the power of his motors and by automatic controls projecting a high voltage potential through the air around the lake. And then in addition to other protective appliances already installed Omega put a similar wall about the cottage, much to Thalma's relief and delight.

One night they had retired early, Thalma being weary and her time but a few weeks away. To the sweet strain of music which had been in the air for ages, they soon fell asleep. How long he had slept Omega could never guess, but he was awakened suddenly. He sat up bewildered and stared into the darkness, because for some reason all lamps were out. And then he became aware of a peculiar sound coming from afar. It was a queer noise combining the roar of the surf upon a rock-bound coast, the sigh of the night wind through a forest and the rumble of thunder. Suddenly it seemed to him that earth and cottage were trembling, and the walls of the room swayed and buckled as though smitten by a great wind.

Frantically he rubbed his eyes, convinced that it was all a dream. But the noise drew nearer, thundered in his ears. In terror he got to his feet, tried to cry out. The words froze on his lips, for just then the wall before him crashed in as though struck by an avalanche. Then came a grinding, splitting jumble of sounds, the solid ground shook under the passage of some mighty force which increased for a moment followed by a piercing scream.

Frozen with horror Omega stared around the wrecked room whose tottering walls seemed about to fall upon him. Where was Thalma? In a frenzy he stared into the darkness, felt over the couch. She was gone!

In some way he got outside and there in the direction of the lake he saw the monster, its great bulk looming high above the ground, its head swaying with the swing of its legs as it lumbered along. And, merciful God—held in the grip of the monster's jaws was Thalma!

The awful sight galvanized Omega to action. With a hoarse scream he launched himself at the beast, passed rapidly through the air above the monster and reached out for his wife. Scream after scream rent the still air as he pressed forward and the beast lurched on in its haste to reach the lake with its prey. But now Omega was close to his beloved, and he reached out to grasp her as once more he screamed right into the ears of his enemy. Then perhaps in sheer terror at the audacity of man, the great jaws of the monster relaxed and Thalma fell limp and unconscious to the ground.

As the beast lumbered on Omega knelt by her side.

"Thank God," he breathed, "she lives!"

Then he took her in his arms and turned back to the ruined home just as a great splash informed him that once more the monster had entered his element to challenge them for its possession.

Thalma soon revived, but she clung to Omega and gazed about fearfully. How she had wandered out of doors and had been snapped up by the beast she could not tell, but Omega said that she must have been walking in her sleep. They went at once to the ship and there spent the remainder of the night.

Every light, including those about the Mirror, had been extinguished by the beast breaking the circuit. Yet it appeared that the latter's passage through the electric wall had caused no harm. Omega explained that likely its bony scales had acted as an insulator against the action of the invisible wall.

While the cottage was being repaired they remained on the ship. But despite their recent harrowing experience, they went back to the cottage when the repairs were complete. It was more home-like than the ship, and Thalma had learned to love it, for it was to be the cradle of a new race. But before they again took up their residence there Omega had erected a high fence around the cottage yard. This fence was built of heavy cables securely fastened to huge posts, and each cable carried an electric charge of 75,000 volts. Omega was confident that the beast could never break through. His confidence was shared by Thalma, but as an additional precaution she suggested that Omega place a similar fence about the lake. He did so, and when the last cable was in place they stood back and surveyed the work with satisfaction.

"We have him now," exulted Omega. "He can never leave the lake alive, much less reach the cottage. Despite his tough armor of scales this high potential will penetrate to his vitals."

"It is well," said Thalma as they turned away.

As they neared the cottage they knew that a crisis was at hand. Forgetting the dead world about them and subduing the fears that sometimes clutched their hearts, they lived in the joy of anticipation and made ready for the advent of a new soul.

Night came down moonless and dark save for the light of the stars. In the recesses of the rocks and in the bottoms of the valleys intense darkness held sway. But the grounds and the home of Omega, and Thalma were ablaze with a thousand lamps, and on the near-by hillsides giant searchlights, which seemed to have no basis, which were born in the bosom of the air and blazed without visible cause, shot their rays into the sky for miles. Yet the powerful lights about the cottage were so-tinted as to be restful to the eye. Thus silent and with clock-like regularity the agents of Omega performed their functions. Man had mastered all the elements of life. All were his friends and servants, and none was his master save one—death.

In a perfect setting and exactly at the time set for the event Alpha came into the world, the child thrived from its first intake of earth's air.

Three weeks from birth Alpha partook of solid food in tablet form drawn chiefly from gaseous sources. At two months his speech was perfect, and at six months his education began. By glandular control Omega nurtured both his body and his mind and developed them rapidly. Small wonder that this child—the last to grace and bless the world—became his parent's only joy and hope. They guarded him from all dangers, instructed him in the great part he was to play in the world's future and set about to conserve that element on which all depended—the waters of the lake.

But during all these long, hot days and frigid nights,

the close proximity of the monster cast a shadow over their souls, marred their happiness by day and terrorized their dreams by night. Often, when the sun beat down upon the lake, they saw his hideous head rise high above the water and regard them with baleful eyes. Twice while at play Alpha had seen him and had run screaming to the protection of his mother, who had great difficulty in persuading him that there was no danger. This seemed to be true, for the mother made no attempt to force the fence. Endowed with more than the cunning of its remote progenitors, it seemed to realize that it was trapped. Many nights Omega and Thalma, armed with their ray guns and other implements of destruction, watched for the beast to attempt to come on land. Sometimes he would raise his head and look at them so long and steadily that icy chills ran along their spines and their hands shook so that they could not sight their weapons and therefore shot wild. Then the head would sink out of sight again.

Secure as they felt against his horrible presence it finally began to sap their courage. Besides, the lake fascinated Alpha, now but three years old but large and strong. He loved to wander by its shore and dabble in the water, but so long as the beast remained, an ever present danger was in this play. Besides there was the fear that he might escape the watchfulness of his parents and come in contact with one of the high tension cables.

And then Omega determined to try another plan—he would electrically charge the water of the lake. He hoped that this would reach the monster in his watery lair and kill him instantly. So he constructed two giant magnets and placed one on each end of the lake. Then harnessing all the electrical energy at his command he sent a tremendous current through the water with high potential, alternating it at ten second intervals for an hour.

Two weeks later he watched for the carcass of the beast to rise. He felt now that his problem was to get rid of it so that it would not pollute the water, but it did not appear.

With fear and trembling Omega observed that the water of the lake was receding inch by inch. Then by chemical action on the coral beds and on the rocks, he created a dense cloud and caused it to form over the lake, thus in a measure protecting it from the sun's rays. But day by day, despite the sheltering cloud, the water receded. Day after day Omega moved his gauges hoping against hope that somehow and somewhere nature would again awaken and bring water upon the earth.

During all these days and months the monster did not raise its head above the surface of the lake—Omega was certain of this, for had the water been disturbed ever so little his water seismograph, as well as his cameras, would have recorded it. The monster was dead at last and they were profoundly thankful. They were the undisputed masters of the earth's last water! Now Alpha could play about the shore and swim in the shallow water in peace and safety. So the dangerous fence was removed.

Omega knew that in the beginning the Creator had made man master of his own destiny. He had endowed him with reason and given the earth into his keeping. Omega thoroughly understood the Ruling Power of the universe. He read aright His commands, blazoned across the breasts of billions of worlds, and by the same token he knew that humanity on earth was doomed. Yet he was urged on by that unconquerable spirit which

had made man king of all. He set up his rain-making machinery with the smile of a fatalist. For hundreds of miles its sinuous beams sprang into the sky, writhed about like great, hungry serpents with their tremendous sucking and receiving maws, then coiled back to earth bringing not a drop of moisture with them.

But one day the Mirror again showed small, faint clouds upon its surface. They were scattered over various parts of the world and their presence made Omega wonder. There appeared to be no reason for them.

"I do not understand those clouds," he said to Thalma as he sat with her and Alpha in the shade of the coral tree. "Perhaps there are hidden places of moisture, that have escaped the receiving rays of this mirror."

"Let us go and see," exclaimed Thalma, her eyes a gleam with a new hope. "Let us make another voyage around the world. Alpha has never been far from home."

"That is so," he agreed. "We will go at once."

So they entered the silver ship and sailed away over the hot, dry wastes, on and on over the cities of antiquity. The ruins of New York, London, Paris and other marts of the ancients were visited in their melancholy quest for life. But even the sites of these cities were hard to find. Only the tops of the tallest structures, such as the tip of the Washington monument and the towers of office buildings stood above the ashes and sands of centuries. But not even the shadow of a cloud was seen. Still they sailed on—even skirted the dark wastes of the poles and stopped in deep valleys to test for water. Twice around the equatorial regions they voyaged in search of a new and better haven, but in vain. The insistent cry for water burned in their souls and led them back to the little lake—the last sop nature had to offer the remnant of her children.

Although the days were still hot and blistering, the nights were cold, ice often forming on the lake near the shore and lingering until touched by the advancing sun. Omega understood, and again a cold fear clutched his heart. Unless by some miracle of the heavens sufficient moisture should come back to the earth, no human soul could long endure the heat of the day and the freezing temperature of night.

To still further conserve the precious water of the lake, Omega now extended the folds of the cloud curtain down to its shores thus completely enclosing it. And as this further reduced the evaporation to a remarkable extent the hopes of Omega and Thalma took on new life. Here they visioned Alpha and his children living and dying in peace, now that the monster was no more. With the help of additional safeguards Omega reckoned that the water might be made to last many more years, and, before it could become wholly exhausted, some whim of nature might again shower the earth with rain.

Now to pass the time—for there was nothing to do except to direct the appliances about them—this last trio of mortals loved to leave the shelter of the cottage, now that they had nothing further to fear from the sea monster, when the westering sun was low, and ramble among the shadows of the cliffs and commune with the past, until the chill of night drove them indoors. Sometimes sitting there in the dusk Thalma and Alpha would listen to Omega's rich voice as he recounted an epic story in the life of long ago. So to-day seated together on a cliff above the airship, they watched the sun descend. Thalma and Alpha had asked for a story, but Omega refused. For some time he had sat silent, his

great, brilliant eyes on the flaming sun as it sank toward the rim of the earth. A great loneliness had suddenly seized him. He recognized it as a presentiment of disaster. It was beyond the analysis of reason, but for the first time in his life he longed to hold back that sun. Somehow he feared the advent of the night. It seemed to him that before the morning light would again flood the earth a dire calamity would befall them.

"Why so sad?" asked Thalma, fearfully, and Alpha, at his father's knees, looked up in wonder.

"It is nothing," replied Omega with forced composure as he caressed the boy. "Some foolish thoughts of mine. Now as it is getting chilly I think we had better go down. Oh, how I dread this awful cold which is creeping steadily and mercilessly over the world!" he added as if to himself, his eyes lingering on the sun.

With her usual sweet smile Thalma agreed. So they rose and floated down. When they reached the floor of the valley they paused and regarded the cloud that screened the lake.

"It does well," remarked Omega. "It will make the water last into the years."

"Yes, and all for our boy," said Thalma proudly. Alpha had left them and was playing along the shore.

"It is now time that a mate for him be on the way," went on Omega wistfully. "He must have a sister, you know."

"It is true," she agreed with a glad smile.

Omega had spoken truly. Without a mate Alpha could not perpetuate the race. And so it was arranged that before the rising of the morrow's sun a new life should begin.

Science had steadily advanced the span of life. When Alpha was born Omega was two hundred years old, but that was only middle age. Thalma was twenty-five years his junior. The human birth-rate had decreased with the passing of the centuries and nature now demanded the most exacting conditions for the propagation of the human species. Thalma at her age could not afford to wait longer. Alpha's mate must be provided forthwith.

"Alpha wants to play a while before going in," Thalma continued presently. "I will remain with him."

"Very well, dear," said Omega. "I will go on and prepare dinner."

So saying he set his face toward the cottage, but before he had taken a dozen steps he was startled by a piercing scream from Thalma. He turned swiftly, then stood paralyzed with terror and amazement. Out of the cloud curtain surrounding the lake protruded the ugly scale-covered head and neck of the monster he had believed dead! And the horrible, swaying head was darting down toward the playing boy! The monster's jaws were spread wide, its black tongue was leaping out and in like lightning, the sickening saliva was dripping upon the sand, and its awful eyes were blazing like coals. And then in a twinkling the huge jaws seized the child, the head reared back, the jaws closed, stifling the lad's screams, and it started to draw back into the cloud.

But, after the first onrush of horror, life came again to Omega's numbed senses. He darted forward with a mad cry, and as he swung through the air rather than ran, he seized a stone and hurled it at the brute's head. His aim was true and the stone struck the great brute on the bony hood above the right eye. It did not harm, but it maddened the monster. Hissing horribly it swung

Alpha high in the air and with a fling dashed him down upon the rocks. Then with a hoarse bellow it turned upon Omega. With its first forward lunge it seemed about to crush Thalma, who was between it and its intended victim. But the sight of her mangled child and the danger to her lord roused all the latent fury and courage in her soul and made of her a fighting demon. Like Omega she grabbed the first weapon at hand—a stone the size of a man's fist—and with the hot breath of the monster in her face she hurled the stone with all her strength straight into the red, gaping mouth.

With a blood-curdling scream the brute halted, reared backward, then ran its head back and forth over the rocks. Its loathsome body thrashed about in the lake, throwing water far up on the beach. Then in its contortions it wallowed up out of the lake as it swung its terrible head about in agony, all the while hissing its challenge.

Terror-stricken, unable to move, Omega and Thalma watched it and could not understand its writhings. But as it continued to writhe and groan they understood at last—the stone had lodged firmly in its throat and was choking it to death.

Then they sprang to Alpha's side. Omega gathered him up in his arms, but he saw with one agonized glance that he was dead. His skull was crushed and it appeared that every bone in his body was broken.

Omega's heart was bursting, but he did not cry out. Holding the crushed body of his son, he raised his eyes to that God who throughout the ages had hidden His face from man, and smiled a brave smile of humility and resignation. While Thalma, understanding all, looked on dumb and dry-eyed.

Leaving the monster floundering about in its death agony, they took their beloved son to the cottage and there injected those chemicals which would forever arrest decay. Then they placed him on his cot that he might be with them to the end of life. It was then that Thalma, broken in spirit, found refuge and relief in tears which have been woman's solace and savior since time began.

And Omega, gazing out toward the lake, saw that the monster lay still. They had won their long battle, but at an awful cost. Omega realized that the gigantic creature, probably deep in a water cavern, had been only stunned by the electric charges.

Thelma refused to be comforted. Day after day she wept above the lifeless form of her boy. All Omega's words of consolation, all his reasoning and faith in the wisdom and justice of all things, failed to sooth her torn heart. Nor did the promise of another child, rouse her from her sorrow. She steadfastly refused to consider another child. Life had lost its last hold on her soul, and now she was ready to surrender to that cruel fate which had given them mirages of promise and mocked their misery. In vain Omega explained that it was their duty to fight on; that they, the last of a once noble race, must not show the white feather of cowardice. He mentioned the great consolation they had of having their beloved son ever near them, though lifeless. But Thalma longed for the presence of the soul, for those words of endearment and love that had thrilled her mother heart.

Before the embalmment it would have been possible for Omega to restore life to his boy. Man had mastered all the secrets of biology and life. He could have mended the broken bones and tissues, revitalized the

heart and lungs and cleared the brain. Alpha would have walked with them again. But his personality would not have been there. That mysterious something, men call the soul, had fled forever, and so far mankind had not been able to create its counterpart. To have brought life again to Alpha would have been a travesty on the brilliant mind they had known. Omega recalled many pathetic examples of such resuscitation where the living had walked in death.

Thalma took but little nourishment, and day by day she drooped lower in the burden of her grief. Omega took her for long rambles among the dusty peaks, tried to interest her in a new machine he had under construction with which he hoped to gather all the remaining water vapor still on earth, condense it in a cloud above the lake and precipitate its moisture thereon. For her entertainment he drew upon the records of history, placing the scenes before her with all their sordidness and heartaches eliminated. He tried to enlist her sympathy and aid in a plan he had to beautify their drab environment. All to no purpose. She answered his pleadings with murmurings of despair, and gazed at him with dull, listless eyes.

Omega foresaw the end, but he smiled in the face of it all. He was the same kind and loving companion Thalma had always known, her every want his command and law. But no more she realized its inspiration and love. He seldom left her side any more, but sometimes overcome with sorrow he would soar up above the peaks and commune alone with the past.

So to-day he had risen higher than usual. The red sun beat upon his body as he hovered in the hot air, his eyes fixed on the distant sky line. He gazed like a famished animal, for it seemed to him that at last a cloud must appear above that hopeless shore of land and sky and bring renewed life to him and his. Yet he fully realized the impossibility of such a thing. Slowly his great, dark eyes roved around the horizon. He loathed its dreary monotony, and still it fascinated him. Beyond that dead line of land and sky lay nothing but ghastly death. His many voyages in the airship and the reflecting Mirror told him that, but still he hoped on.

When at last he glided down to the cottage the sun was low. Having registered the time in his mind when he left Thalma—for countless generations man had dispensed with time-keeping devices—he realized that he had been gone just three hours. Reproaching himself for his negligence he entered the doorway, then stared aghast.

Upon Thalma's wide couch facing a painting of the ancient, green world, she had placed the body of Alpha, then lain down by his side. Her glazed eyes were fixed upon the picture, and for the first time in many weeks there was a smile about her lips.

Omega knelt by her side, took her cold hands in his and feverishly kissed her brow. With a grief too deep for tears he smiled at death, thankful for the love she had borne him. Nor did he censure the Plan of the Creator, the Plan that had led him, Omega, scion of the world's great, up to the zenith of life and now left him alone, the sole representative of its power. Thalma had passed on, and in the first crushing moments of his agony Omega was tempted to join her. Without effort and without fear or pain, his was the power to check the machinery of life.

Crushed and broken, Omega sat by his dead, while the shadows of night entered the valley and wrapped all in their soft embrace. When would his own hour strike? He might retard or hasten that time, but the real answer lay in that little lake out there under the stars, daily shrinking despite the cloud curtain. There was nothing more to live for, yet he determined to live, to go down fighting like a valiant knight of old, to set an example for the sons of other worlds.

But despite his brave resolution his grief for a while seemed likely to master him. Heart-broken he finally went out into the cold dusk and gazed up at the heavens appealingly.

"Alone!" he whispered as an overwhelming sense of his isolation tore his spirit. "Alone in a dead world—the sole survivor of its vanished life!"

He slumped to the ground and buried his face in the cold dust. Never before had the awfulness of his prospects crushed his heart. Alone in a terrible abyss of death! Was there a God, after all? And was there any relief from this loneliness? The dry cold, more penetrating and merciless in this last gasp of earth's moisture, chilled him to the bone, and yet filled him with a hot, poignant pain. For the first time in his long life he thought of prayer. Why not ask his Creator to succor him, to give him wisdom to understand why he, of all earth's children, had been spared to the last? But his thoughts were jumbled in a maze of pain and sorrow. He could neither pray nor think. Gasping, dying a thousand deaths, he lay there groveling in the dust. But at last he rose, dashed the dust from his eyes and again faced the sky. He would accept the cruel mandate of nature. He would live on and try to conquer all—even death.

He cast his eyes along the shore of the lake, and there in the starlight loomed the form of the dead monster which, but for Thalma's unerring aim, would have been the last of earth's creatures. Omega sighed and turned back to his dead.

But despite his resolution to live the loneliness was sapping Omega's spirit. During the following weeks in a mood of recklessness and despair he allowed the cloud curtain to dissolve above the lake. Once more the sun's hot rays poured down unhindered and the lake receded rapidly.

As time went on Omega grew more restless. Only by taking many voyages around the world was he able to endure the appalling silence. He was the last traveler to visit the ancient marts of man, he was the last hope and despair of life. Sometimes he talked aloud to himself, but his words sounded hollow and ghostly in that deep silence, which only added to his misery.

And then one day in a fit of desperation he rebelled. He cursed the fate that had selected him to drink the last bitter dregs of life. In this desperate frame of mind he evolved a daring plan. He would not drink those dregs alone!

In the chemical laboratory of the ship were all the elements of creative force and life known to man. From the four corners of the earth they had been garnered, and some had come from sister planets. Here were the ingredients of creation. For thousands of years man had been able to create various forms of life. He had evolved many pulsing, squirming things. He had even made man-like apes possessing the instinct of obedience, and which he used for servants, and much of his animal food also had been created in this manner.

Being skilled in all branches of biology and chemistry Omega would create a comrade to share his long wait for death. So he set to work and the task eased the pain in his heart. He placed his chemicals in the test tube and watched the cell evolve until it pulsed with life. Carefully nursing the frail embryo he added other plasms, then fertilized the whole with warm spermatozoa and placed it in the incubator over which glowed a violet, radio-active light.

The young life developed quickly and soon began to take form within the glass walls. In a month it half-filled the incubator, and at the end of six weeks he released it, but it still grew amazingly.

At first Omega was appalled by the monstrosity he had created, for it was a loathsome, repulsive creature. Its head was flat and broad and sat upon its sloping shoulders without a connecting neck. Its legs were short, but its arms were long, and when standing erect it carried them well in front of an enormous torso. Its short hands and feet were webbed like those of a duck. It had no visible ears, and its nostrils were mere holes above a wide, grinning, thin-lipped mouth, which was always spread in a grin. Its large, round, red eyes had no gleam of intelligence, and its hairless skin, covered with minute, sucker-like scales, lay in loose, ugly folds across its great chest. Most of its movements were slow and uncertain, and it hopped about over the floor like a giant toad, uttering guttural sounds deep within its chest. Omega had set out to create an ape-man, but this thing was neither man nor beast, bird or reptile, but a travesty on all—an unspeakable horror from the dead womb of the past.

Yet hideous as this creature was Omega looked upon it with a certain degree of gratitude. It was a companion at least, and it seemed to reciprocate the respect of its creator by fawning upon him and licking his hand. Its red tongue always hung from its slavering mouth like that of a panting dog. Omega named it The Grinner, because of its habitual and ghastly smile. He took it to the cottage that it might wait on him through the long hours of solitude. That night it slept by his side, content and motionless. But the next morning after this first night of incongruous companionship Omega was awakened by its stertorous breathing and the touch of a cold, clammy sweat which was oozing from its pores and dropping upon the floor.

Throughout the day Omega marveled at this phenomenon. He noticed that the weird thing went often to the drinking fountain and wrapped its tongue about the water jet. That night he awakened at midnight to find The Grinner gone. He did not bother to look for him and mid-forenoon he returned. His rotund form seemed to have grown even larger, and as he ambled about on all fours the sweat trickled from his repulsive skin and trailed across the floor. It was a strange thing and Omega was at a loss to account for it, but his wonder was eclipsed by his appreciation of The Grinner's companionship. The Grinner was often absent for hours at a time, but he always returned of his own free will. Omega often saw him ambling among the rocks or stretched out in the sun on the beach. He formed the habit of letting him have his way, which was that of extreme laziness. But during all this time he was growing prodigiously. In three months he had become a monster weighing well over half a ton, but he still retained his amiable nature and affection for his master.

Omega seldom left the cottage. Determined to live as long as possible—for the age-old urge of life still persisted—to do nothing to hasten his end, he, nevertheless, was doing nothing to defer it. His soul in the past, he desired only to be near his dear ones. For hours he would sit gazing on their peaceful features, pouring into their heedless ears the love songs of his heart. Living for them, patiently awaiting the day when he, too, could enter into rest, he paid less and less attention to The Grinner, only noticing that he grew more horrible and repulsive as his size increased.

Lonely and despondent Omega at last left the cottage only to go to the airship for supplies. He seldom even looked toward the lake. It was a long time since he had walked about its shores, but one afternoon the impulse came to wander that way again. He was amazed that the water was disappearing so rapidly. The body of the monster now lay more than fifteen rods from the water's edge, though it had been killed on the edge of the lake.

With an indifferent and melancholy gaze Omega looked across the lake. Suddenly his stare became fixed and wild, like that of one stricken dumb. About twenty rods out the water was suddenly agitated as though by the movement of some great bulk along its bottom, and then for a fleeting instant he glimpsed a dark, shining form heave above the surface, then sink out of sight before he could grasp its details.

"My God," he exclaimed hoarsely, "there is another sea monster! Likely it is the mate of the one Thalma killed. I might have known there would be a mate. We were dealing with two of the beasts all that time. And now this thing disputes my right to the water!"

Omega's face grew grim and stern as he glared out over the water and his heart-beats quickened. The latent combativeness of humanity was once more aroused in him. He had considered himself the last representative of life on earth. He should remain the last. No beast should claim that honor. He would kill it.

Then for two weeks he waited and watched for it to reappear, waited with all the terrible atomic weapons at hand, but he saw it no more. The Grinner sleeping in the sand was the only form of life to be seen, and at last he became weary of the hunt. He figured that some day he would charge the lake, but there was no hurry. A spell of procrastination, indifference and apathy settled on him at last, and his attitude toward this last beast began to undergo a remarkable change. This beast had not harmed them—they had killed the guilty one. And what mattered it anyway, if the beast did survive him? He realized with a shock that his senses were becoming dulled by the terrible loneliness. At such times he would throw off the spell. He would go after the monster again, but before he could take definite action he would again delay.

At last Omega lost all interest in the things about him. The Grinner came and went unhindered and almost unnoticed. He continued to grow, but Omega gave him little thought. Even the treasures in the airship had lost their lure for him. Disconsolate and hopeless, yet clinging grimly to life, he passed his time in the company of his dead.

He had not left the cottage for several weeks, when, one cold morning after a sleepless night, something impelled him to go in search of The Grinner who had been absent all night. As this had become a frequent occurrence during the past two months Omega's curi-

osity was aroused. As he glided toward the lake he wondered why his interest in his surroundings had been aroused by thoughts of The Grinner, and once more he thought of killing that other sea-monster in the lake. The lake! He stopped and stared and stared. The lake was gone! Only a pool of an acre or two remained, and in its center, disporting himself in glee was—not the monster he was looking for—but The Grinner! The bloated creature was rolling about in the water with all the abandonment of a mud-wallowing hog.

Omega gazed in astonishment, then a shrill laugh escaped him. He had mistaken The Grinner for another monster of the deep. It was the last joke of life, and it was on him.

Then he realized that this grotesque child of his hands, having in its system the combined thirst of the dry ages—man, animal, plant, bird and reptile—was sucking up the lake, absorbing it through his pores, then sweating it out only to repeat the process. Water was his element and food. From the dim, dry past had come nature's cry for water to find expression in this monster of Omega's making. That which he had created for a companion had grown into a terrible menace, which was rapidly exhausting his remaining stronghold of life. But, somehow, Omega did not care, and as he watched the monstrous thing finally flounder its way to the shore and lie down panting in the sun, he was glad that it was not another monster of the deep.

For a moment Omega's eyes rested on the drying form of the dead beast on the slope above him, then with a shudder he turned to The Grinner.

He went up close and stared into its terrible eyes which blinked back at him as its mouth spread in a leer. Already the sweat was coursing along the slimy folds of its skin and dripping off to be swallowed by the thirsty ground. It was a huge water sucker. It took water in enormous quantities, fed upon its organisms, then discharged it through its skin. Assisted by the rays of the sun it was rapidly drying up the lake.

Now, as Omega stood regarding it in awe and wonder, it showed signs of distress. It began to writhe and utter hoarse cries of pain. Its eyes rolled horribly, its great, barrel-like body heaved and trembled, and it waved its long arms and threshed its feet upon the ground. Omega realized that it was the victim of its own abnormal-appetite. With the relish of a gormandizer it had taken more of its peculiar food than even its prodigious maw could assimilate. Soon its struggles became fiercer. It rolled over and over in contortions of agony, the sweat streaming from its body, while a pitiful moaning came from its horrid mouth. But at last it became quiet, its moanings trailed off into silence, it jerked spasmodically and lay still.

Omega approached and placed his hand over its heart. There was no pulsation. The Grinner was dead.

With a sigh Omega turned back to the cottage. Although he was now alone once more, he did not care. All he had to do was to prepare himself for the Great Adventure, which despite all man's god-like achievements, still remained a mystery.

Now that the lake was almost gone it again drew his attention. The sickly grass had long since given up trying to follow the retreating water and now was only a dead and melancholy strip of yellow far back from the shore. Every day Omega went to the little pool and

calmly watched it fade away, watched without qualms of fear or heartache. He was ready. But even now, hot and weary, he refused adequately to slake his thirst. He must fight on to the last, for such was the prerogative and duty of the human race. He must conserve that precious fluid.

At last there came a morning when Omega, gazing from his doorway, looked in vain for the shining pool. Nothing but a brown expanse of rock and sand met his view where the lake had been. Already the salt crystals were glinting in the sun. A long, lingering sigh escaped him. It had come at last! The last water of those mighty seas which once had covered nearly the whole earth, had departed leaving him alone with the dead of ages.

Hot and feverish he glided over the dry bed of the lake, on past the horrid forms of the monster and of The Grinner, drying in the sun. For twenty-five hours not a drop of water had passed his lips, and now that the lake was gone his thirst was maddening. It was horribly cold and dreary, for the sun had not yet dispelled the chill of the night. He was amazed that the last of the water had disappeared in the darkness. He had hoped that it would last for a few days longer, for the voices of life still clamored in his heart. Perhaps he might find a wee drop somewhere to moisten his dry lips. So down the deep cleft he went, seeking eagerly among the crevices for signs of water, peering into the dark caverns that lined the way. Water! water! The insistent cry throbbed madly through his brain. For it alone he lived. For it alone he would have braved the fires of hell. And then at last in the lowest depression on earth he found it in a little hollow of the rock a mere cupful of water. Like a thirst-maddened animal he thrust his lips into it and sucked it up in great gulps, then licked the rock dry. **IT WAS THE LAST DROP!**

Omega rose, his face calm and resigned. With a smile of gratitude he looked up at the sky. The water was bitter, but to him it was nectar and he was thankful that he had been given the final cup.

Then he went to the airship and shot up into the blue and on around the world in a voyage of farewell. In a few hours he was back. Reverently he set the airship down on its landing place. He was through with it now. Its usefulness was gone, its great, pulsing motors forever silent, soon to be covered with the dust of ages, he would leave it a monument to mankind. For a little while he wandered among the treasures of the ship. Sacred as they were they still mocked him with their impotency to stay the hand of death. But he loved them all. Thalma had loved them and they had been Alpha's playmates, and their marvelous powers had been his hope and inspiration. With loving caresses and a full heart he bade good-bye to these treasures of his fathers, soon to become the keepsakes of death.

At last having completed the rounds he let himself out into the still air. Resolutely he set his face toward home.

The hot noonday sun, beating fiercely down on the dead world, entered the cottage and fell in a flood of glory about the couch where Omega, the last man, lay between his loved ones. His great eyes were set and staring, but on his features rested a smile of peace—the seal of life's last dream.

"The rest is silence."

THE END



Miss Wormersley crept across the hall to the studio door and would have entered had not Minna, who now caught sight of her, motioned for her to keep back. She wondered, but waited.

Delilah

By Margaretta W. Rea

THIS story brings in some very remarkable phases of what may be properly called "Dream Life." It also touches on the artistic temperament.

Illustrated by MOREY

A N. "oh," half cry, half moan, came from the studio.

Miss Wormersley's spoon paused above her grape fruit. A second cry, more piercing, rose slowly, then fell and died trembling away.

A full minute of intense silence followed. Then Miss Wormersley rose calmly and left the room, her younger companion hurrying after her.

On the threshold of the studio they stopped. Before his big canvas stood the elder woman's nephew, rubbing his eyes as though he would brush away some terrible sight. Two big white spaces glared from the center of the canvas, but the rest appeared to be finished. The artist's agonized gaze clung to the figure of a wolf in the lower left-hand corner. He stepped nearer, and reaching out a trembling hand touched the wolf's head. Instantly he drew back, and the same long cry of pain broke from him again.

The paint was wet.

The young girl who had followed Miss Wormersley pushed into the room and hurried to the artist's side.

"What is it, Bert? What is the matter, dear?"

The artist clutched her to him roughly.

"My picture," he moaned, "my picture. Somebody else has been painting my picture."

"Is that all?" The intense relief in the tone showed that Miss Wormersley had feared something worse.

"Nonsense," she said, laying a firm hand on her nephew's shoulder, "you did it yourself last night. I tell you, Bertram, if you don't learn to take your work more calmly, you'll land in the Insane Asylum and cheat poor Minna here out of a husband. Why, Minna and I know you were here in this very room all last evening. You've worked yourself up to such a pitch of nervous excitement you don't know what you do do. How could anyone have gotten in here. I looked——"

Minna's extended hand interrupted her. The side window of the studio was open.

The artist's gaze still clung to his picture. "I couldn't have, Auntie, I couldn't have," he was saying in a beseeching voice. "I know I didn't. Oh my picture! and I've spent years to be able to do just that. Who could have done so perfectly just what I've longed and longed to do."

"Bertram, dear, listen," Minna entreated soothingly. "I saw you sitting here last night, just as you often do, on that little stool, studying your picture and chewing on a brush handle. See," she picked up a brush lying on the palette, "here's the very brush. Look, Miss Wormersley, the paint on it is wet, too, and just matches." She laughed tenderly in the artist's face, but he shook his head vaguely. The girl put her arms impulsively around him and drew him down beside her on the sofa.

Miss Wormersley turned from the open window to

the wet canvas. She firmly believed her nephew had painted that wolf's head the night before, while she and Minna had been sitting in the living-room, but she couldn't understand the open window, and anything mysterious was distasteful to her. She mistrusted where she could not understand. She watched Minna, rumpling her nephew's hair with loving fingers while she called him a "dear old silly," and the aunt wished she could express her sympathy more plainly. But her prim nature made such a demonstration impossible. Minna would make him a good wife. It took an artist to understand an artist.

Meanwhile Bertram sat quietly submitting to his betroth's endearments, but his aunt knew he was not satisfied with the explanation.

"You'd better brace up, Bertram," she said sharply, "and go to work. If you don't finish this picture what will Mrs. Beekman-Smythe say after all the money she has spent on your education?"

Minna jumped up and impulsively drew Miss Wormersley toward the big canvas.

"Isn't it splendid?" she exclaimed all aglow with enthusiasm. "Miss Wormersley, I've painted nothing but animals for five years and I know just how wonderful this is. See the cold calculation in that wolf's eye. He wants that old ram as badly as the rest do, but he sees those two hunters leaving the woods, and he isn't going to take any chances."

Miss Wormersley looked on with mild appreciation, but she couldn't summon such real enthusiasm as Minna seemed to feel over the expression on an old wolf's face. Instead she straightened the girl's collar and rearranged a comb, so that it did its duty properly and held back the vagrant wisps that would curl around Minna's little pink ears. Miss Wormersley was an orderly soul, and she loved neatness more than all the animal pictures in the world.

"I guess you and Bert are well matched," she said, "if that was my piece of work I couldn't sit there and moan. I'd keep working 'till it was done. I can't abide my work staring me in the face unfinished."

She glanced toward her nephew to see if he responded to her suggestion, but it was of no use. The artist merely shook his head despondently. "It isn't mine," he said lifelessly. "I can't exhibit what isn't mine."

THE following morning Miss Wormersley and Minna stood before Bert's big canvas. Amazement kept both silent for they knew the artist had not touched a brush to the big canvas during the preceding evening; yet, from where the second white space had been the day before, now glared a new wolf's head, the leader of the pack. Moreover, the paint was quite wet. Only one white space now remained.

"The window?" questioned Minna in an awed voice.

"Was open when I came down." Miss Wormersley

spoke tartly. How the prosaic lady hated mysteries.

"But you locked it yourself," said the girl, "the last thing before we went to bed and Bertram had already gone up ahead of us."

Miss Wormersley nodded and held up a warning finger.

The artist shuffled into the room. He looked at the women first and then he saw the second finished head.

"I knew it," he groaned dropping onto the couch. "Somebody else is painting my picture."

"But how could they, dear? It can't be all spoiled." Minna would have tried to soothe away his fears, but Miss Wormersley had no time now for optimistic raving as she called it. She thrust a wire hairpin vigorously into the tight knob at the back of her head and called the maid.

Lisbeth appeared at once stepping softly and glancing fearfully at the artist's dejected head and Minna's round eyes.

"Did you open that window this morning?"

"No 'em."

"Or at any other time?"

"No, Miss Wormersley."

"Did you hear any noises in the night?"

"No 'em," hesitatingly.

"Sure?"

"No 'em, only——"

"What?"

"I hear Miss Sayre," timidly indicating Minna, "go to her room about two o'clock."

Miss Wormersley turned sharply towards Minna.

"I couldn't sleep," explained the girl, "and I did get up and put a cold cloth on the back of my neck, but I don't know what time that was."

The elder woman's tone softened a little as she turned back to the maid. "Did you hear anything else, Lisbeth?"

"Only Mr. Bertram snoring like he always does when he's overtired."

"That will do." Miss Wormersley looked helplessly at her nephew, then wonderingly at the girl he was engaged to marry. Minna seemed to slowly realize that Bertram's aunt was not satisfied with her explanation. She jumped up and laid her hand anxiously on Miss Wormersley's arm.

"You don't think I did it? That I'd meddle with Bert's wonderful picture, do you?"

"Oh, I don't know what to think." Much as Miss Wormersley had grown to care for the girl it was almost easier for her to suspect Minna of meddling and so have a straight explanation, than to grope among mysterious doings. She began mechanically wiping the dust from the smooth parts of the furniture. She always carried a dust-cloth in the pocket of her black sateen apron, and now in a moment of intense perplexity her nervousness drove her to an occupation that was second nature to her. She moved from chair to chair, to table, to couch arms, and window sill. Nobody spoke. Then she started absentmindedly about the room again, dusting the same articles a second time. She felt Minna's frightened eyes following her, but with every labored breath which she heard her nephew draw, her heart hardened against the impulsive, affectionate girl.

Miss Wormersley had had the care of Bertram since his mother had died when he was four, and his good-

for-nothing father had disappeared. She had trained, clothed, fed, and educated the boy till he was almost like her own. Then when he had shown a decided talent for drawing, she had given a reluctant consent for a rich patroness to pay for his education abroad.

The artistic temperament had been the ruin of the young man's father, and now it had brought the son to this.

Miss Wormersley had liked Minna from the first, and had invited the girl to pay her a visit. But if she had done this trick. Wasn't there a story somewhere of a painter's studio boy, who had finished a great picture of his master's in his absence, and done it well? She faced Minna suddenly.

"Lisbeth says you were up last night. Bertram has been teaching you some stroke of his till he said only day before yesterday you got it as well as he did. Is that stroke, or whatever you call it, in that head that's just been done?"

Minna nodded, then she pushed Miss Wormersley away and threw herself on her knees at Bertram's feet.

"Bert, Bert," she sobbed, pulling his hands from his face, and making him look at her. "You know I didn't touch your picture, you know I couldn't, don't you? Why, I love it just as much as you do, and the Exhibition only five days away."

The artist drew her hand from his face and laid his cheek against it. "I know, Minna, I know you didn't."

"See?" Minna raised her tearful face to Bertram's aunt, but there was no relenting there.

"Could she have?" Miss Wormersley's thin body swayed towards the lovers: Bertram had to answer.

"Why, no—maybe—I don't know. Perhaps you'd better telephone Mr. Brownell."

He slumped dejectedly into the corner of the sofa, and Minna stood as if turned to stone.

Miss Wormersley went to the telephone. She felt Mr. Brownell was just the one to appeal to. He was critic at the coming exhibition, and had always been friendly to Bertram. He would know just what to do. Her voice already showed her relief as she explained the matter very concisely over the wire, not hesitating to add her suspicions of Minna.

When she returned to the studio her nephew's face was hidden in his arms but Minna had not moved.

"Mr. Brownell says he'll be down the first thing in the morning, and if he can he'll bring Mrs. Beekman-Smythe with him. He says not to touch the picture. You," the glance she gave Minna hurt, "had better leave Bertram to get over this as best he can. You'll have to stay here till Mr. Brownell says what you're to do."

THE next morning Miss Wormersley looked from the dejected figures before her to the rain drizzling down outside. In the silences that followed her questions, it beat monotonously on the skylight above.

The artist was slumped in his usual corner, his high knees on a level with his chin, the chin resting on a crooked tie.

The big picture was finished.

The last white space on the canvas was filled. The center figure of the ram stood out strong and tense, as he defiantly faced the ravening pack, whose snarling jaws already drooled in anticipation of the juicy meal. His eyes were held by the leader. In horrible fascination the two gazed at each other; the wolf luring, com-

pling, the ram terrified, but held against his will. The pack waited.

Before the canvas stood Minna drooping like a brilliant flower, that has been blasted just as it was about to bloom.

Miss Wormersley pointed a finger towards the ram's head. "Do you still deny your part in this?"

Minna could only shake her head hopelessly. She had no voice.

The elder woman looked disdainfully at the girl's untidy hair, then turned to the maid.

"You said you hear noises last night. What were they?"

Lisbeth wrenched her eyes from the picture and fastened them in awe upon her mistress. "I heard Miss Sayre moving about her room, and footsteps on the stairs."

"Why didn't you call me?"

"I was afraid."

"Did you get up?"

"Yes 'em."

"What did you do?"

"I locked my door and crept back to bed."

Miss Wormersley sniffed. "Fraid cat. Wish I'd heard it. Anything else?"

The maid hung back.

"Speak up. Tell everything you know."

"When I went to Miss Sayre's room this morning her bed hadn't been slept in."

"Is that all?"

"Yes 'em."

"You may go. Let Mr. Brownell in. Thank Heavens he's come. Sit up, Bertram, he's brought Mrs. Beekman-Smythe. Too bad to have to bring them out in such weather."

While she waited for Lisbeth to let in the callers, Miss Wormersley smoothed her apron and set the chairs straight. She picked up the artist's palette and laid it on the table.

"Did you say the chewed brush was missing?" she asked her nephew.

He raised his head and nodded, then let it sink disconsolately upon his breast.

"Guess it's not very far off," said his aunt looking pertinently toward Minna's drooping figure. The girl made no sign that she had heard. Miss Wormersley hastened to greet her visitors. She brightened perceptibly as Mr. Brownell entered, and welcomed him with a cordial smile and a deprecating nod toward her nephew, who neither moved nor looked up. Mrs. Beekman-Smythe's greeting was warm but hasty; for her eyes had caught sight of the big canvas. She hurried to it and stood silently studying every detail, while Miss Wormersley rehearsed the events of the past three days to Mr. Brownell.

At first the critic seemed to pooh-pooh the seriousness of the situation just as she herself had done that first morning; but, as she finished her account of Lisbeth's testimony of that very day, he looked grave.

"He's not only lost his picture," continued Miss Wormersley so that everyone in the studio could hear, "and you know he's lived for years just to paint that picture, but he counted on using the money it brought him to repay Mrs. Beekman-Smythe, and now who'll buy a picture when you can't say who painted it? Besides, the disappointment of being ruined by one you

trusted." Mr. Brownell would have pushed this last aside, but Miss Wormersley was for facing the facts. "What else can we think? No one else knew except myself and Miss Sayre, and surely no one will accuse me. I never painted even a barn door."

Mrs. Beekman-Smythe now asked gently, "Why do you feel so sure Miss Sayre did this? Surely it's Bertram's style in every tiny detail."

"Yes, but we know, Miss Sayre and I, that Bertram did not touch that canvas either last evening or the evening before that. As to the night the first head was painted, he was here in the studio alone and neither Miss Sayre nor I noticed the picture when we went to bed. But last night and Tuesday night my nephew spent the entire evening in the living-room with us. I, myself, locked that window the last thing before I retired, and the space was empty on that canvas that we found filled the following morning. Miss Sayre knew just what my nephew hoped to portray on each face, and for two months he has been teaching her a certain stroke they both agree is used there. Besides, both nights my maid has heard Miss Sayre come upstairs, and at the same time she says she heard Bertram snoring. Then last night Miss Sayre's bed wasn't even slept in. She is the only one who could have done it."

"But the window?" put in Mrs. Beekman-Smythe.

Miss Wormersley shrugged impatiently. "An attempt to avert suspicion. And this morning one of the brushes is missing."

Mrs. Beekman-Smythe turned to Minna. She regarded the girl speculatively a few moments, and her expression softened. Miss Wormersley didn't wonder as she noted Minna's forlorn appearance.

Suddenly the art patronness went to the girl and held out her hand with a smile. Minna hesitated a second then placed her own in it eagerly. Her composure almost gave way at the warm pressure, then she left the room quickly. When she returned Miss Wormersley was showing Mr. Brownell one of the girl's own animal pictures. She was holding it so that the light fell full upon it, and was looking questioningly from the critic to the patronness. The critic examined it with care, glancing frequently towards the big canvas.

"No, no," he said, half aloud. "Well, I suppose it's possible, eh, Mrs. Beekman-Smythe; such things have been done under stress of great excitement. What do you say, Bert?"

He spoke twice before he was able to rouse the artist and then his only response was a look of misery and a murmured, "it isn't mine, it isn't mine, I can never paint again."

Mrs. Beekman-Smythe's eye filled with pity and she explained to Miss Wormersley that her nephew had lost faith in himself. "Too bad, too bad," she said, "it would have been better to have lost his picture altogether than to lose his self-confidence." Then to Mr. Brownell, "There's no one else who, you think, could have, I mean would be able, to paint that picture, is there?"

The critic stepped to the big canvas and studied it more closely.

"No," he finally said, "only Orlaf, the Russian. He is supposed to have made an exhaustive study of wolves, but this isn't his style at all."

He turned suddenly from the picture.

"Would it have won?" The question fell unwittingly from Mrs. Beekman-Smythe.

"It must have." There was no shadow of a doubt in the critic's tone. "I've never seen its equal. And now it's lost. It's an unknown, unless—" He looked from the artist's bowed head to the girl gazing disconsolately at the falling rain.

"Look here, my dear." He spoke kindly as he drew Minna from the window. "I didn't see you paint that picture, and the boy here knows he didn't. No one else that we know of could have, because you're the only one except Miss Wormersley and she doesn't paint, you're the only one who knew what Bertram had in his mind. Now won't you admit you were carried away with it? You love him, you've probably been in perfect sympathy with him, and watched his work. It may have been a clear case of inspiration on your part. Now why not collaborate with him? Let the picture be shown next week as the joint work of both of you. It will save his reputation. The picture will probably be sold for a fabulous sum, and you know," he lowered his voice and Mrs. Beekman-Smythe walked to the window to be out of hearing, "you know, we all do, that Bertram feels his honor is at stake here. He has counted on selling this picture to pay back Mrs. Beekman-Smythe. Isn't that so, Bert?"

The artist had straightened up and was listening.

"You'd be willing to collaborate with Miss Sayre? And you can understand how she might have been carried away with her enthusiasm for the picture, and worked on it without realizing what it meant to you till afterwards, can't you?"

Bertram nodded.

"And you, Minna, you must see what you should do in this."

The critic's kindly tone and his informal use of her first name, and most of all the dumb entreaty in Bert's eyes were too much for Minna.

"I can't," she sobbed, "I can't. I didn't do it. I've never so much as touched a brush to Bert's picture, and I can't say I have." She turned towards Mrs. Beekman-Smythe, who was silently studying a small unfinished canvas of the big ram. The art patroness put her arm around the girl, and for several minutes they stood regarding that small picture and talking in low tones, until Mrs. Beekman-Smythe noticed the silence at the other end of the studio, and, pressing Minna's arm affectionately, left her and approached Miss Wormersley.

"I've been thinking Miss Wormersley, we'd better go and let matters straighten themselves out if they can. Don't worry, Bert, I know a man who will surely buy that picture anyway. You had better go abroad and travel for awhile then. Get back your strength and you'll feel anxious to take up your work again."

She spoke kindly but the artist was not encouraged.

"I'll never paint again. It isn't mine. Somebody else can do, better than I can, what I have been studying for years."

THAT evening as Miss Wormersley was about to retire for the night the telephone rang and Mrs. Beekman-Smythe asked to speak to Bertram. The artist seemed scarcely able to hold the receiver still enough to listen, but when he had caught the first words his whole body grew tense.

"Oh, I can't," he replied in an agonized voice, "I can't." He paused and the tone that came over the wire sounded persuasive.

Miss Wormersley couldn't hear what it said. She glanced at Minna. The girl was leaning forward in her chair, her face intent, watching Bertram.

"I can't, I can't, not even for you," he exclaimed miserably and dropped the receiver.

His aunt went to him quickly and helped him from the room. When she returned Minna was still sitting on the edge of the chair, her eyes on the floor, her hands clasped tightly on her knee. A stranger would have thought her praying for her lips moved.

Miss Wormersley went at once to her and shook her violently. "And you're not yet satisfied with the misery you've caused. That boy will be a maniac if this keeps up."

She shook Minna again and the girl got to her feet clumsily. The elder woman continued her tirade.

"So that's what you got that woman to do. That's what you put her up to this morning, to ask him to paint that small canvas of the ram's head for her." With this Miss Wormersley shook her head so close to Minna that the girl backed away. She followed, and so backing and following they approached the door.

"As if he hadn't had enough of this infernal painting. You've not only spoiled his picture, you've ruined his life. You let him pour out to you all his aspirations, the dreams of years; you get him to teach you his wonderful stroke, and then you turn on him, and use what he's confided to you to ruin him. DELILAH. DELILAH."

The last word was hissed after Minna as she ran from the room.

SHORTLY after midnight Miss Wormersley awoke suddenly.

She listened intently, raising herself quietly on her elbow and straining her eyes through the dark towards the hall door, from which a noise seemed to come. Bertram was snoring, but that was not what had awakened her.

She groped about for her slippers, then wrapping herself in a bathrobe she tip-toed into the hall. A soft light came through the window at the far end, which enabled her to see the outline of the stair railing and the doors on either side. Her nephew's was ajar, but Minna's was open wide. At the head of the stairs, she stopped short and gripped the rail.

A square of light illuminated the lower hall. It came from the studio. What could the girl be doing down there now? The picture was finished. There was nothing more to paint, nothing only the small canvas of the ram's head. She thought hard for a few seconds. Mrs. Beekman-Smythe had said she could sell the picture. Was Minna going to destroy it now she had it finished? The awful name she had called the girl earlier in the evening flashed into her mind, and she whispered it to herself with satisfaction, "Delilah," then again almost purring over the second syllable, "Delilah."

She was glad of the soft carpet on the stairs that muffled her tread as she crept down. She could hear Minna moving about the room below.

Stealthily, like a thief, Miss Wormersley stole along the hall to the studio door. Then she straightened up and took a deliberate look. Minna, completely dressed and wholly unconscious of any presence but her own, was apparently tidying up the room which had been left in some disorder after the morning's excitement. No one had had the heart to touch it. She placed the chairs back

in their usual position and also straightened the afghan on the couch and the pillows. Then she picked up the small canvas of the ram's head, which Mrs. Beekman-Smythe had left standing near the window, and put it back against the opposite wall where it had stood the past few days. When this was done she looked about the room. Everything seemed to suit her. At last she went to the window, and craned her neck to see down the porch. Miss Wormersley fancied she could detect a smile on the girl's face, but perhaps it was only the uncertain light. Minna now unlocked the window and locked it again. The catch seemed to stick, and she worked it in and out several times till it moved more easily, and then she left it locked, only caught just enough so she could unfasten it with one finger.

As she turned back into the studio she put her hand in her pocket and drew out the chewed brush.

When Miss Wormersley saw this she took a step forward; but as she did so, a noise from behind arrested her. Someone was coming down the stairs, someone in pyjamas. Through the dim light she could see the white legs. They came slowly but with perfect assurance, and she knew he was coming to the studio. She glanced at Minna and stepped behind the curtain across the hall. She'd let her nephew find his girl meddling with his work and that would settle the matter. It really couldn't have worked out better. She parted the curtain cautiously and peeked out just as Minna heard the steps in the hall. From her hiding-place Miss Wormersley could see the girl stop and listen. Then she hastily laid the chewed brush near the palette, and turned out the light.

The artist entered his studio. He made no effort to walk quietly. In fact, he stepped out boldly in spite of the almost complete darkness. In the very dim light from the skylight Miss Wormersley could see his long arm raised towards the electric switch overhead. When the light came on she saw Minna behind the big screen peeking through the crack between its sides.

The artist went directly to the porch window, unlocked and opened it as he always did before starting work in the summer time. Then he walked to the other side of the room and came back with the small canvas of the ram's head, which he placed on an easel in the usual position he used to work in during the day. Without a second's hesitation he took up his palette and the chewed brush and went to work.

Miss Wormersley crept across the hall to the studio door and would have entered had not Minna, who now caught sight of her, motioned frantically for her to keep back. She wondered, but waited. From where she stood, she could see the small canvas and that part of the big picture occupied by the ram. Her nephew stood with the large picture on his left. He worked quickly and positively. Not once did he turn towards the big picture yet the ram's head on the small canvas grew rapidly into an exact counterpart of the one on the big canvas. What did it all mean? He was like his old self again. Miss Wormersley had not realized how much the boy's welfare had meant to her, till she now saw him wrapped up in his work just as he used to be; and then contrasted that with the broken, unnerved man who had slumped all day in the corner of the sofa.

An hour passed. Still the picture grew. Miss Wormersley watched his work as she had never done before. How a single stroke changed the whole face of the ram. She

was fascinated. She began to understand what Minna had meant when she raved about the marvelous expression he gave to his animal faces. The ram's terror communicated itself to her. She shuddered involuntarily.

Once her nephew stepped back and looked intently at his work. Then he turned so his aunt got a closer view of his own face, and she would have fallen at the revelation it gave her had she not steadied herself against the door jam. Suddenly she understood it all.

Her nephew was asleep. His eyes were wide open, but there was no doubt as far as she was concerned, they were sightless.

Minna motioned to her to remain quiet. She extended her arm across the closed sash of the window and beckoned. In a second Mr. Brownell appeared at the opening followed by Mrs. Beekman-Smythe.

Probably the fresh air-let in by the critic or a slight noise startled the artist. He stopped painting. The ram's head was almost complete. The artist's breath came with an effort and his body began to sway, but Minna was watching. She stepped quickly to his side, as the brush and palette rattled to the floor. Mr. Brownell slipped a chair behind him and they led him gently into it.

"Drink this, dear, and you'll feel better," said Minna tenderly holding a glass to his lips. He did as he was bid and grew slowly more conscious of his surroundings. Then the old trouble returned and he began to moan. "My picture, oh, my picture. I'll never—"

"Stop, Bertram," Mr. Brownell's voice was sharp, and he gave the artist a shake. "Look up. You just painted this yourself in your sleep."

He held the small canvas before him, but Bertram only looked at it blankly.

Mrs. Beekman-Smythe took his hand and began to stroke it.

"My dear boy, it's all your own work. You did it all in your sleep, didn't he, Miss Wormersley? And Minna has proved it to us. See, there's your palette. See the fresh paint on your fingers and there's your brush where you just dropped it."

The look of bewilderment began to pass slowly from the artist's face. Mrs. Beekman-Smythe held a second glass to his lips and he drained it more eagerly.

"Listen, Bertram," she said as the liquor braced him up, "you worked yourself into such a nervous condition that you hypnotized yourself. And although asleep your mind made you do what way down in your subconscious self you really wanted to do more than anything else."

"Yes, this," he answered, pointing to the small canvas, "but that?"

"Minna saw you paint the big one, yourself night before last; but she wanted to prove beyond doubt to us and most of all to yourself, that it is all your own work. We've watched you paint this small head and it is absolutely exactly like the big one. There's no doubt at all, is there, Mr. Brownell? And Bertram, the application went this morning; Minna gave it to me to send, so the picture can go to the Exhibition under your own name. You've Minna to thank for all this."

The tears welled up into the artist's eyes. He could only hold out his hand to his betrothed, but the generous girl put her arm through Miss Wormersley's and drew her towards him, too.

The prim lady was prim no longer.

"How did you know?" she asked, boldly, wiping her

(Continued on page 954)

Radicalite

By Richard Rush Murray

***E**VEN scientists, who should know better, often "play with fire"—in one form or another. With a little more patience and a little less unwarranted self-confidence, von Sturmfeld, of this clever short story, might have benefitted the world. But, perhaps some of our young experimenters of the present day can pick up the thread of investigation where the scientist in the story left off.*

Illustrated by MOREY

I WAS touring Europe with my brother John and two friends. We had visited England, France, Italy, and Switzerland, and were now winding up the trip in the capital of the former Imperial German Empire, Berlin, seeing the sights, visiting the famed public buildings and palaces of the once proud nobility, and, last but far from least, patronizing the city's hospitable beer gardens! These latter, I feared, might prove the undoing of my brother, for he had been on a continual "spree" ever since our arrival; two days previously, and resentfully resisted all efforts made by Ralph Mason, Bill Sylvester (our two friends), and myself to get him to "taper off."

This particular morning, the 21st of September, found me strolling down the broad sidewalk beneath the spreading linden trees on the "Unter den Linden," that famous street of old Berlin. There seemed to be few people promenading, and so I had the immediate part of the sidewalk entirely to myself. Speeding motors filled the roadway, however.

I was standing on the curb when a gentleman whom I had not noticed, stepped off into the roadway, dodged a flying taxi, and then stumbled directly into the path of another. Without pausing to realize the foolishness of my act, or reckoning the possible consequences to myself, I made a flying leap for him, in a way that was reminiscent of an old time buck through the center of a football line in college days, striking him squarely in the back with my shoulder. The impetus of my body almost served to carry us both out of the path of the swiftly moving vehicle; almost, but not quite. The mudguard of the machine struck my leg and bowled us into the gutter, where we lay for a second, sprawled all over each other.

Passers-by seemed to spring up in every direction; the sidewalks which had, a scant moment before, seemed deserted, now teemed with hurrying, inquisitive humanity. All were bent upon aiding us, but they only managed to nearly crush us in the throng that gathered on all sides.

I picked myself up and assisted the gentleman to arise and brush himself off. He turned toward me a lean, scarred face that was the very epitome of hardness; tanned, rugged, and with a pair of light blue eyes that seemed to reflect in their depths the coldness of the Arctic, but just now were glowing with the light of gratitude. Bowing in a peculiar, stiffly military manner and completely ignoring the gaping bystanders, he extended his hand to me.

"I have you to thank for my life, my friend," he exclaimed. "Had it not been for your providentially quick mind, I might now be on my way to the place from which there is no returning. Allow me to introduce myself; I am the Baron von Sturmfeld." He spoke in German, but as I was fluently conversant in that language, I had no difficulty in understanding him.

"And I am Richard MacLeod," I replied, grasping his hand and at the same time taking stock of myself. I found no personal injuries other than a very sore leg where the taxi had struck me.

"I hope the force of our collision did you no damage?"

He waved his hand, dismissing the matter.

"What matters if it did, my friend? But come, let us get away from the street, my apartment is close by, and perhaps I may be able to repair some of the damage that accursed taxi did to your clothes. Also, let me offer you some light refreshment." He beckoned imperiously to another taxi cruising slowly along the street, close to the curb, and we stepped into it.

A short run and we were alighting before an imposing apartment building, several blocks from the place where the accident had occurred. My new friend settled with the driver, and we entered the building, took the elevator, and then were in his apartment. It seemed very luxurious for poverty-stricken Berlin, thought I, as I gazed around me; all sorts of expensive bric-a-brac, knicknacks, and other trifles were scattered in profusion throughout the place. Upon the walls were several pairs of fine sabres, one of which had been



"All the gas has been converted to metal," he told me. "That means that there is a practically perfect vacuum in the globe, more perfect than ever appeared before."

designed for dueling purposes. I looked from them to the face of my host, which was criss-crossed with the unmistakable white scars that betokened much fighting in past years. He caught my glance and smiled, a long, slow smile that spoke volumes.

"Yes, friend MacLeod, you have guessed rightly. Those sabres and these scars are relics of a youth that I would were mine to live once more. A stormy, tempestuous youth, but one in which I enjoyed myself, and of which I am not ashamed. But pardon me, I pray you, while I summon my man and have him attend to you at once."

So saying, he clapped his hands twice in a sharp manner, and almost immediately a man, clad in valet's livery, appeared from behind a curtained doorway.

"Heinrich, take the gentleman to the guest-room and see that everything is done for his comfort. Give him suitable clothes from my wardrobe and send his own to the tailor at once."

I began to protest at the trouble being taken in my behalf, but von Sturmfeld waved my protests aside.

"Nonsense, my friend, I owe my life to you; nothing is too good for your comfort."

So admonished, there was naught for me to do but to obey, which I did, graciously. Following the valet out through another door than that which had given me entrance, I passed through a long hall and into a large bedroom. Here the man, Heinrich, opened the door into a bathroom and ran a bath for me, while I divested myself of my soiled and mussed clothes. Gathering these up as I stepped into the bath, he vanished, to reappear as I was briskly rubbing myself down after having finished with a cold shower, bearing in his arms a complete outfit of his master's.

Very shortly I was once more within the room which was so lavishly furnished, and which was evidently my host's "den," or study. Here I found Herr von Sturmfeld awaiting me. He regarded me pleasantly over the end of a long, fragrant cigar, and motioned me to a seat, indicating the cigars with his other hand.

"Mr. MacLeod, I have sent your clothes out to the tailor, for I do not wish you to feel the slightest inconvenience as a result of your mishap this morning," he told me. "In the meantime, I trust you will join me in a little drink. I have taken the liberty of sending my man for one. And perhaps you will tell me something about yourself, *nicht wahr?*"

I sank back into the chair with a sigh of contentment. My leg was aching abominably, and I was stiff and sore all over as a result of the shaking up I had received. A drink would be most welcome, indeed.

I was about to speak when Heinrich entered, bearing with him a little tray on which reposed two glasses and a decanter. The sight of the latter moved me to straighten a little in my chair, at which my host laughed amusedly.

"You need not tell me your nationality, after that gesture. No one but an American would move so fast, or so instinctively, at the sight of a drink."

"Here," filling one of the glasses from the decanter as he spoke, "I think you will agree with me that this is an extremely good liqueur."

We touched glasses, and I sipped the liquid that sparkled at me so invitingly from my glass. It had a deceptive smoothness that almost led me astray at first, as I would have downed it at one gulp had not an intuitive sense of caution warned me in time. It resembled

so much liquid fire, and I nearly choked upon the little that I had taken. Glancing up, I caught an amused twinkle in the eyes of Herr von Sturmfeld, a twinkle that disappeared instantly.

"No," he chuckled, as he sipped his own in a meditative fashion, "it is not a drink that one cares to toss off as one would an American cocktail." I silently agreed with him.

"Well, sir, I have little enough to say for myself," I remarked, by way of opening the conversation. "My brother, myself, and two friends have been touring Europe this summer, and we are ending up our trip in Germany with a short stay in Berlin. I am, as you may have surmised, just out of college, and my father thought that perhaps a trip abroad might be a good thing before settling down to the monotonous grind of earning my own living. I have thought that I might take up writing as a vocation, but must confess that I have not yet reached a decision as to just what to do."

"What was your college, if I may ask?"

"Harvard."

"Ah, yes, I spent two very pleasant years in Cambridge, studying chemistry and physics in the graduate school, just before the war, after completing my four years at Heidelberg. How well I remember the college and the yard surrounding it. Tell me, does the old statue of John Harvard yet remain in the yard?"

"Yes, indeed," I nodded, "it's still there."

Von Sturmfeld laughed until the tears rolled from his eyes.

"My days in Cambridge were merry ones, my friend," he cried. "One of the pleasant little tricks for which I was nearly sent home in disgrace was that of crowning the statue with a wreath of broom straws and then surrounding it with broken beer bottles. Yes, those were pleasant days."

"But you say you have ambitions to write?"

"Sometimes I think I have and then again I don't know. Occasionally I have the plot of a good story all worked out in my mind, but then, before I can get it down on paper it fades from my recollection and I am lost again."

My host was quiet for a short time, gazing reflectively at his glass. Finally he spoke.

"Mr. MacLeod, if you should care to listen to the story I have desired to tell you, it might, perchance, be the very material you are seeking for your first attempt. Of course, you must change the names of the principal characters, but that will matter little. You will probably think me stark mad, but I assure you I am not. My story is as true as any of the happenings of the late war, incredible as it may seem. Do you wish to hear it?"

I looked at him, all my interest quickened and aroused.

"I certainly would," I told him. "Never mind whether I believe it or not."

"Very well," was the reply, as he lighted another cigar, "here it is."

Von Sturmfeld's Story

AS you already know, my family was of the nobility; my father, the Baron von Sturmfeld, traced his lineage back a thousand years to the days of Charlemagne. It was the custom for the sons of nobles to enter the army or the navy, and so it happened that, when I had finished my graduate work at Harvard, I found myself once more in the Fatherland, commis-

sioned a lieutenant in the Prussian Guards Regiment, of which the whole world has heard.

The war came. Through my father's influence, I had myself transferred to the Imperial Air Service. For the remainder of my time I fought in the air, and many were the Allied planes that fell before my flaming guns. Soon I was an ace, and not long after this, his Imperial Highness, the Crown Prince, fastened the Iron Cross on my flying tunic. But my days in the air were numbered.

One morning, in the last year of the war, I set out with the other members of my squadron on our usual morning patrol of the front, seeking Allied flyers. I was now a captain and in command of the squadron, and so I was in the lead. We soon found what we sought and in no time were engaged in a wild "dog-fight" with a group of Americans. Up and down, banking and turning, looping the loop, zooming and flying in circles, until the very sky seemed topsy-turvy, always with the coughing rattle and bark of machine guns drumming in my ears, I had my sights aligned upon the enemy leader a dozen times, but never could I hold them thus, long enough to press the trigger.

At last I had him in a "box" from which he could not escape. Peering at him through the cross-hair sights and exultantly pulling the trigger of my Spandau, my ears were rewarded by the hammering pound and rocking recoil of the exploding shells as the gun vomited forth its hail of leaden death. My opponent's fuel tank blew up; I saw him wave his hand once in gay, reckless salute of farewell to the victor, as he unstrapped his belt and leaped from his plane, preferring a swift, merciful death upon the ground five thousand feet below to being trapped in the fiery coffin his ship was so rapidly becoming.

And then my turn came. I had a vision of an American ship driving at me full tilt, its engine roaring and its spitting guns pouring forth the death that I felt instinctively had at last reached me. I saw a line of holes drilled through the side of the fuselage, saw the smoking trails left in the paths of the tracer bullets; saw the altimeter upon the cowling fly into a thousand fragments, and then felt thundering oblivion descend upon me!

When I again became conscious of the world around me, I found myself working as a common laborer, feeding the furnaces in the chemical plant of the "Bädische Anilin und Soda Fabrik," in the little town of Oppau, near Mannheim, almost three years later. How I had gotten there, or what my means of livelihood had been during the time since being shot down over the trenches in France, I was unable to find out. I could not even determine the base hospital in which I had recovered from the effects of the American bullet that, plowing across my thick skull, had all but removed me from this life.

While making these inquiries, I decided to remain in my laborer's position for a while, as the full depression of post-war reaction was upon Germany, and one who had a job had something for which to be extremely thankful! I eventually located my family, living in an obscure village not far from Berlin, and when I made myself known to them, you can imagine their joy and relief. For three years I had been lost—to all intents and purposes, dead. My return, therefore, was something of a miracle. One reason they had never located me was the fact that I had been working at the plant

under an assumed name; I was known there as "Johann Grüg."

It soon became apparent to me that there was an undercurrent of something going on in the "Bädische" plant; something of vast importance, but try as I might, I could get no inkling for a long time of what it was, beyond the fact that there had been made a number of sensational discoveries in the production of ammonium salts, and that some of these were directly concerned with a new catalyst that would greatly cheapen certain chemical manufacturing processes. Mere laborer that I was, there was little chance of admittance for me to the councils of the chief chemists of the company, but nevertheless I was determined to find out what it was all about.

One day, as I was industriously engaged in shoveling coal into my furnaces, one of these chemists happened to pass through the furnace room on his way to the underground laboratory where the more delicate experiments and reactions were carried out. Something about the face of this man struck a responsive chord in my subconscious mind; I was certain that I had seen him before, although I was not able to say where at the moment. I wrestled mentally with it for some time, and then, suddenly, it flashed upon me that he was Lieutenant Herman Krug, formerly one of my classmates in America, and later a member of the branch of our army that corresponded to your Chemical Warfare Service. I decided then and there to make myself known to him, as I was disgusted with my present work, had no desire to continue it, and thought that as long as I had had such good training in chemistry, I would be foolish not to seize an opportunity to procure myself a good position. Moreover, if they were actually on the track of some new, immensely valuable compound, the thing appealed tremendously to my adventurous instincts.

In a short time, Krug was returning through the room on his way to the upper floor. I stepped into his path and spoke to him.

"Hello, Krug, old fellow, don't you know your old classmate?"

He drew back and looked at me sharply, smiling in a puzzled fashion.

"Your face is familiar, but I can't seem to place you. Who are you?"

"Merely the man with whom you went to school in America many years ago; I'm Ferdinand von Sturm-feld, at your service!"

"Well, upon my word! I'm certainly glad to see you, Fritz! Come up above with me to my office, where we can talk quietly, and tell me what in the world you're doing here in such clothes as those!"

I followed him up several flights of stairs, into a comfortably furnished office, where we sat down. He questioned me at length as to why I was there, working in the guise of a common laborer, so I did my best to satisfy him with the tale of how I had been shot down over the lines in the war, how I had lost my memory for nearly three years, and how, despite all my inquiries, I had learned nothing of the way in which I had spent the intervening time. I mentioned that I was traveling under an assumed name, "Johann Grüg," although it had been assumed before I regained my memory.

"Your story is extremely interesting, Fritz, and you've turned up at a most opportune moment. We're very much in need of a chemist who possesses superior

qualifications, and I can offer you interesting work and a chance to make your everlasting fortune! You are probably wondering what it is all about?"

It was, indeed, a source of much mystification to me, and I told him so, although, deep down in my mind, I had already connected it with the rumors with which the air was filled.

"Most likely you have heard some of the current rumors around the plant, concerning our experiments with various ammonium compounds, as well as what little has gotten out about the development of a new catalytic contact agent. I will not go now into the events of my own personal history since we last met. Sufficient to say that I have been retained by the company to work on these new developments, and that we have a very large personal 'stake' in view. If you care to accept a position as my assistant, I can guarantee you enough money out of it to make yourself financially independent for the rest of your life."

"To make a short story of it, we have been striving to produce metallic ammonium. You will, of course, remember that ammonia gas is a compound of nitrogen and hydrogen, with the formula NH_3 , but that it enters into compounds in the form of a radical with the formula (NH_4) . Ammonium chlorid, for instance, (produced by the interaction of hydrochloric acid and ammonium hydroxide) has the formula $(\text{NH}_4)\text{Cl}$. The (NH_4) radical, as you know, behaves like a metal in its reactions, but has so far defied all attempts to isolate it in metallic form. The closest anyone has come to obtaining it is in the form of an amalgam with mercury; when the chemist attempted to drive off the latter as a vapor by heating the amalgam, the (NH_4) broke down into ordinary NH_3 , ammonia gas, and free hydrogen. Many have speculated as to what metallic ammonium would be like, or what properties it would exhibit, were it possible ever to isolate it.

"I need hardly tell you now that this is what we have been working on, nor that we have succeeded in our efforts. Only a short time ago we produced the metal for the first time, and since then we have been experimenting with it. We found that it is extremely unstable, decomposing with an explosive violence far beyond that of any other explosive known. In its appearance it resembles sodium, being a soft, malleable metal that can be cut with a knife and exhibiting a sheen like silver. In its chemical properties it remains the same as before, having a combining valence of one.

"Our method of producing this metal depends upon an action of which very few chemists are cognizant, namely, the effect a cathode ray discharge has upon certain gases. If you remember, cathode rays are the radiations produced by an electrical discharge of extremely high potential in a vacuum tube which has been highly exhausted.

"When the cathode rays are allowed to fall upon acetylene, the gas produced by the interaction of water and calcium carbide, they cause it to be precipitated as a yellow powder. During my experiments with ammonia and ammonium compounds, it occurred to me that perhaps these rays would affect ammonia gas in a similar way. Filling a glass bulb with the gas, I directed a stream of cathode rays upon it for more than an hour. When I came to examine the contents of the bulb, I found traces of silvery, metallic powder, while the pressure of the ammonia had been reduced by nearly one half.

"This powder proved to be metallic ammonium, for it exhibited precisely the chemical properties of the ammonium radical; behaving in all its reactions in identically the same way—it had the same valence and the same molecular weight. The problem now was to find a use for it and then develop a method of quantity production.

"We found that there were two uses to which the metallic ammonium could be put, both exceedingly valuable; it could be disintegrated explosively into its original constituents, as I mentioned, thus providing an admirable substance for use in munitions of war, and, far more important, it could be used to replace spongy platinum as a catalyst, or contact agent, in the commercial manufacture of sulphuric acid. Platinum is, of course, a tremendously expensive metal, and it has long been evident that anyone discovering a cheap substitute for it in this process would make untold amounts of money.

"In the contact process, a mixture of sulphur dioxide and oxygen are passed over a heated piece of asbestos, which has the spongy platinum spread over its fibers in the form of a fine gray powder. Sulphur trioxide, mixed with excess oxygen, issues as a vapor and is condensed by being led into 97-99% sulphuric acid, the concentration of the liquid being maintained at this point by a regulated influx of water.

"We have tried substituting the metallic ammonium, or 'Radicalite,' as I have named it, because of its being the isolated form of the ammonium radical, for the platinum in the contact process, with complete success. It does the work admirably.

"I condensed enough ammonia to form about ten milligrams of the metal and then, placing it within an immensely strong metal chamber, tried the effect of passing through it an electric current of quite high intensity. It exploded violently; the chamber withstood the shock, although it was cracked, but when I opened it and tested the remaining gases, I could find no trace of the original constituents of the ammonium, nitrogen and hydrogen. I concluded that the atoms of these two elements were broken down, or disintegrated, and that this explained the terrific force of the explosion. This, of course, showed us that the new compound would be immensely valuable in war.

"I next tried the effect of compressing the ammonia before treating it with the cathode radiations, and found that the ratio of change into the metallic form was greatly increased. Still, it took a relatively enormous amount of ammonia to produce any radicalite, and it could be seen that the process was analogous to the production of liquid air, in which a large amount of air is condensed to form a very small volume of liquid. It was easy to procure the ammonia, but I decided that to perfect our method of production, the strength of the cathode rays must be increased.

"Previous to our experiments, the best tubes were in America, in the laboratories of the General Electric Company, and were developed by their Doctor Coolidge. His tubes were exhausted to a point where the pressure was about equal to 0.01 millimetre of mercury and they took a potential of three hundred and fifty thousand volts. He secured his cathode radiation by means of a tubular anode, into which the rays were focussed from the hot cathode, and out of which they passed through a nickel window about 0.005 inches thick. The rays passed almost entirely through this window, and

manifested themselves in a darkened room by a discharge extending more than two feet from the end of the tube. When these rays encountered human flesh, they produced bad burns. It was a tube of this type, by the way, that was used in our first experiments that led to the production of metallic radicalite.

"By means of a special vacuum pump, we have been enabled to carry the exhaustion of our tubes to a much higher degree, approaching 0.0001 millimetre of mercury. This, of course, necessitates a vastly increased potential, and so we are using a voltage of one million five hundred thousand. When our tube is placed in action, the discharge extends twenty feet from its end, and is fatal to all organic life so unfortunate as to come under its influence. One of the workmen, unacquainted with its terrific power, was imprudent enough to attempt to walk through the beam of rays emanating from the nickel window in the tube's walls. He had no more than entered it when he fell to the floor. He was killed instantly and burned and charred in a most horrible manner. You can imagine that this made us extremely careful in handling our new discovery!

"When this tremendous ray discharge was applied to ammonia compressed to a pressure of twenty atmospheres, it precipitated it instantly. Ten litres at this pressure produced about a gram of the metal. With its production, the last link in the chain has been forged, for we now have in our hands the means of revolutionizing the sulphuric acid industry.

"About a hundred pounds of radicalite have been made, and are stored in the laboratory on the far side of the furnace room. We are continuing our experiments there with the hope that we can eliminate the unstable features of radicalite that cause it to explode when the temperature rises above four hundred and fifty degrees centigrade. Come, I will show you the apparatus with which all this has been accomplished."

Arising from his chair, Krug led the way through a corridor into a large laboratory. Immediately my eyes were struck by the sight of a huge Crookes vacuum tube on a table in the center of the room. Beside it, with a metal window in its side opposite the one in the Crookes tube, was another which I decided must be the one in which the transformation of ammonia into radicalite took place. Krug strode across the room and turned a valve, allowing a hissing-stream of gas to flow into the second globe. He then closed a switch and lighted the cathode of the Crookes tube. When the latter had become sufficiently heated, he pressed another switch which, by remote control, closed the high potential circuit.

Instantly a faint glow surrounded the anode, while the glass near the point at which the metal window was inset flamed with a peculiar greenish-yellow fluorescence. The ammonia-filled globe blazed bright red for an instant, then again was colorless.

Krug opened the switch to the Crookes tube and led me to the table. Pointing to the globe, he called my attention to the tiny amount of metallic powder that lay in the bottom.

"All the gas has been converted to metal," he told me. "That means that there is a practically perfect vacuum in the globe, more perfect than any obtained heretofore, even with the best vacuum pumps known."

He allowed the air of the room to flow into the globe. He then emptied the powder out into his hand.

"This is the stuff that will make our fortunes, my friend," he breathed, his eyes shining.

We left the laboratory and returned to his office. As the door closed, he turned to me.

"Von Sturmfeld, you shall be my assistant in the work which still lies ahead, if you so desire. If the position is acceptable, say so, and then you may spend the remainder of the day as best suits you."

I assured him that I considered myself most fortunate in receiving his kind offer, and that I accepted with pleasure.

"Very well," he replied. "I will look for you tomorrow, my friend. I would take the rest of the day off and join you in a little celebration of our reunion, but I must continue my work in the laboratory tonight."

I thanked him again for his great kindness, and took my leave. Little did I dream that I had seen him for the last time in life. I had decided to go to Mannheim, the nearest large city, for the night, and how fortunate for my own safety this decision proved you will soon see.

I purchased some new clothes, went to the theatre, and then retired to my room in one of the larger hotels in the city. I arose early the following morning and was preparing to return to Oppau, when all Mannheim was rocked by the most tremendous explosion that had ever been known there. The ground heaved, windows were broken, crockery tumbled from shelves, and chimneys toppled from roofs, making a veritable shambles of the place. A number of people were killed, and later I learned that the sound of the explosion and the earthshocks reached as far as Bayreuth, one hundred and forty-five miles distant. The airpressure wave caused considerable damage in Frankfurt, fifty-three miles from the scene of the disaster. It was only too apparent to my frantic imagination what had caused this terrific catastrophe, and I took the first taxi I could find, directing the driver to proceed with all possible speed to Oppau.

It was as I had feared; the plant had blown up with the most appalling results to the local surroundings. Not one of the workmen in or near the buildings had escaped, the total loss of life exceeded a thousand, and over four times that number were seriously injured.

Twenty-five hundred people were reported as being in the hospitals of neighboring cities the following day, and the only possible way of rescuing the wounded was for the firemen and other workers to wear gasmasks, as in battle.

The scene was as desolating and horrible as a battlefield. A large part of the town was wiped out of existence, while in other sections the roofs of whole blocks were swept off as by a whirlwind. When it is remembered that the town had a population of only sixty-five hundred, and that a majority of this number were engaged in the *Bädische* works, it is easy to visualize the frightful character of the explosion.

I made inquiries among the various hospitals of the neighborhood, in the faint hope of learning whether or not my friend was still alive, but to no avail. He had been seen by no one since the previous day, and all hope for his safety had been given up.

The reason for the explosion will always be somewhat of a mystery to me, although I am convinced that it was caused by Krug's experiments with the radicalite, in such close proximity to the large amount he had stored in the laboratory. I do know this, however; a brave man, one who gave his all for his chosen profession of science, lost his life with the others in the

explosion that sunny morning nine years ago. Such a man was Hermann Krug, God rest his gallant soul!"

"Well, my friend, you must be fatigued, listening to such a long and dry recital," Von Sturmfield exclaimed, as he concluded the story which had held me utterly entranced. "Come, we will have another drink, and then I must bid you farewell, as I have business matters of pressing importance to which I must attend."

THE END

The Treasure of the Golden God

(Continued from page 889)

with a sharp ejaculation, Joseph uttered a frightened cry, and even Thornton was startled. From within the black and shadowy recesses of the chamber came a short, half-smothered cough!

(To be continued)

Editor's Note: The term El Dorado, the Spanish words meaning the gilded one, is applied to a king or

He again clapped his hands, and when Heinrich appeared ordered more of the delicious liqueur. When we had toasted each other, I arose and took my leave, telling him I would return his clothes as soon as I had reached my lodgings.

"Forget it my friend," he returned. "It is but a small matter. I trust I may enjoy the pleasure of another visit from you in the near future."

high priest who was supposed to appear sometimes before his people with robes sprinkled with gold dust. This is the mythical being alluded to often in this story. It was then applied to the city and afterwards to the country that this gilded being was supposed to belong to and rule over. Sir Walter Raleigh, in the days of Queen Elizabeth, was one of the most celebrated of the searchers for the supposititious treasure, implied.

The Pool of Death

(Continued from page 916)

"It amounts to the same thing doesn't it? I wish you would stop arguing and give me an intelligent explanation."

"Very well, the explanation is very simple. Perhaps you will recall that on the day your husband disappeared, he and Webber were swimming together in the plunge. Webber left the pool early. He had to pass close by the bridge table, where his wife recognized him. But bear in mind that Saconi, who was also there, was sitting with his back to the plunge. All he saw was the back of a man dressed in a conspicuous green and lavender bath robe—a robe which he knew belonged to your husband. Naturally, he jumped at the conclusion that the man he

was plotting to murder was the only person in the pool.

"The next time his partner got the bid and Saconi was the dummy, he excused himself and slipped into his back yard. There he opened the grill between the pool and the secret tank and permitted his monster amoeba to pass into the plunge. Later on, when it had completed its grewsome task, he returned and coaxed the amoeba back to its lair."

"Then you think that Saconi killed George with the belief that he was murdering Sidney?"

"Precisely," said the Master of Mystery. "That's why I was not able to solve the mystery until after the second murder."

THE END

Delilah

(Continued from page 947)

"I suspected," answered Minna, "for I knew no one else could have done it and followed his idea so closely. When the brush was missing I found it in his bed before Lisbeth made it. Then that suggested the night work. Besides, there was no other time when he could have done it, so I watched."

The artist's eyes went from the big canvas to the

little one. His long, sensitive fingers clasped and unclasped.

"It's mine," he whispered hoarsely, seizing Minna's arm and sinking his fingers into the soft flesh until the girl winced behind her cheerful smile.

"It's all mine. I begin to remember. It's all mine. I can paint again."

THE END

What Do You Know?

READERS of AMAZING STORIES have frequently commented upon the fact that there is more actual knowledge to be gained through reading its pages than from many a text-book. Moreover, most of the stories are written in a popular vein, making it possible for anyone to grasp important facts.

The questions which we give below are all answered on the pages as listed at the end of the questions. Please see if you can answer the questions without looking for the answer, and see how well you check up on your general knowledge of science.

1. What legendary monarch was called El Dorado? (See page 871.)
2. What was the other name of the city of El Dorado? (See page 871.)
3. What is the characteristic of the trunk of the South American Mora tree? (See page 881.)
4. What is an olla jar? (See page 892.)
5. What is the *corpus delicti*? (See page 901.)
6. What is a phagocyte?—Give full definition. (See page 902.)
7. What does the word phagocyte mean in its derivation from the Greek? (See page 902.)
8. Describe amoebas, their way of propagating and their actions and way of feeding. (See page 903.)
9. What are pseudopodia? (See page 903.)
10. What is chemotaxis? (See page 904.)
11. Describe the action of the adrenal glands. (See page 910.)
12. What is an important function of the pituitary gland? (See page 911.)
13. Describe the catalytic process of making Sulphuric acid. (See page 951.)
14. If "metallic" ammonium were produced what decomposition would you anticipate? (See page 951.)
15. What is ammonia gas? (See page 952.)
16. How does it enter into compounds?—Give an example. (See page 952.)
17. Can NH_3 be obtained in metallic form? (See page 952.)
18. What does it behave like in compounds? (See page 952.)
19. What other meanings were given to the words El Dorado? (See page 954.)
20. What famous explorer under the reign of Queen Elizabeth went in search of it? (See page 954.)

DISCUSSIONS

In this department we shall discuss, every month, topics of interest to readers. The editors invite correspondence on all subjects directly or indirectly related to the stories appearing in this magazine. In case a special personal answer is required, a nominal fee of 25c to cover time and postage is required.

"AMAZING STORIES" AS AN INSPIRATION TO A YOUNG MAN

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

This, my second letter to you, will be a lot easier to take I hope. I have no bricks to toss this time, just bouquets. I want to say right now that your October number is a "wow." It started off with a bang with almost double the usual number of stories. I might add also that all the stories were good; however, I have my favorites and they are "Space Rocket Murders," "The First Martian," and "The Swordsman of Sarvon." "The Romance of Posi and Nega" in your September issue was also remarkable. The author had a very novel idea and carried it out beautifully.

I have read your magazine for a long time now and I want to tell you right now that from the very first it has fascinated me. In fact I have become so interested in science and astronomy that I am planning my courses in school towards this end. In short, I intend to make the chemical sciences my profession. That is what your magazine has done to me. You may consider it a compliment or not. I do not believe I would ever have arrived at this conclusion had it not been for your magazine. Perhaps I am being influenced a great deal by the fact that almost all of the scientists in your stories gain world-wide fame and glory through their achievements; nevertheless I am going to carry out my ambition, false illusions or not.

Fred Trauger,
Lindsay, Calif.

(We are engaged now in a very special effort to make AMAZING STORIES better than ever. It is perfectly fair to say that if your very complimentary letter adequately describes our magazine, even now it is like a hard-boiled egg—"Hard to Beat." Our personal feeling is that chemistry is developing very fast and we should imagine that it would be an excellent subject for you to try. If you find it hard to get started, remember that the difficulty of beginning life applies to virtually all professions. We thank you sincerely for your good opinion.—EDITOR.)

WE ARE ALWAYS PARTICULARLY GLAD TO RECEIVE LETTERS FROM MEMBERS OF THE FAIR SEX. HAVE YOU READ MISS ROBB'S DELIGHTFUL LETTERS?

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

Strange as it may seem to you, I am now writing this letter with any intention of commenting on any of your stories.

I have read your magazine for nearly three years now, and have no complaint to make; in fact, your stories have helped to while away the hours during my stay at this Academy.

In looking over the last twenty issues I find that very few young ladies write you concerning your publication, or if they do, few ever reach the column. Why is this? Are your stories too weird for the "fair sex," or have they no interest in the science of the future? I would appreciate it very much if you would publish this letter and in return I will write again in the future, providing I receive any replies to this inquiry.

G. Gilbert Alton,
Worcester Academy, Box 301,
Worcester, Mass.

(The Editor may state that our comment on your letter is contained in the heading. We have printed numbers of letters from members of the fair sex to which we presume you belong. Undoubtedly most of our correspondents are men, but some most delightful letters come from the better half of creation, for women are undoubtedly such. Write us again without

waiting for a direct response to this letter.—EDITOR.)

AN APPRAISAL OF SOME STORIES AND AUTHORS. A QUESTION OF THE DATE OF THE QUARTERLY

Editor, AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY:

The Fall-Winter edition of your magazine is the best so far this year. Every one of the stories was good.

"Faster Than Light," by Harl Vincent, is one of the best stories this author has yet written. Just enough science and adventure to suit everyone. Wesso's illustrations are fine. I wish he could have illustrated the entire number.

"Beyond the Veil of Time," by B. H. Burney, I enjoyed very much. It reminded me of stories I had read by H. Rider Haggard. I demand a sequel.

"The King and the Pawn" is the best story Sven Anderton has yet written. Have we heard the last of "His Majesty"?

"Crusaders of Space," by Paul Chadwick, should have been illustrated. It is a good story.

"Into the Mesozoic," I found interesting, though short. It should have had an introduction and an illustration.

If this magazine is a quarterly publication there should be another number in December. Since this issue is called the Fall-Winter number, the next should be called Spring, 1933. This sounds ridiculous, coming out in winter 1932. You should have left the dates as they were and not changed the months of publication.

Jack Darrow,
4229 Sawyer Ave.,
Chicago, Ill.

(A letter of this character is of special value to the Editor as it enlightens him as to what our readers want in the way of stories and as to whom they consider the best authors. An interesting thing about it is that we find that their opinions are apt to coincide with ours and the authors and the stories which our correspondents like are the ones which, in our judgment, are also to be commended. We have a large number of stories on hand awaiting publication. Many of our stories should have sequels and there the trouble comes in—that sequels would increase our large overstock of stories, yet when these sequels come in, we will be glad, undoubtedly, to publish them.—EDITOR.)

ANOTHER LETTER ABOUT THE TEMPERATURE OF BODIES IN THE VACUUM OF SPACE

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

I should like to make a few comments on the letter of Signa F. Collins in the October issue.

R. W. Haysen evidently turns to the corpuscular theory of light (and heat), and Mr. Collins evidently overlooked this theory when he objected to Mr. Haysen's use of the terms, heat "particles or electrons." Of course this theory is not fully accepted, but as far as that is concerned, neither is the "wave" theory. I think that it is best to let this matter stand as it is, but care should be used in such a criticism as Mr. Collins made.

Another thing that Mr. Collins has overlooked is the fact that "space" is a vacuum, and as such is neither hot nor cold. In saying that "space" is a vacuum, I am making use of the pretty well accepted theory that it is such. The temperature of the upper atmosphere would not necessarily lead to the assumption that "space" is cold, and in fact scientists of repute have assumed that space is quite warm, that is the solid matter in space is. I believe that some have even said that its temperature amounts to several hundred degrees above zero.

It has often puzzled me, in reading interplanetary stories, why the builders of interplanetary craft insist on having a vacuum chamber between the inner and outer shells. I wonder how they think that they could possibly produce a better vacuum than "space" itself affords. Of course if the ship is not under absolutely perfect control a vacuum chamber would help while in an atmosphere, but in "space" it would be absolutely useless, since any artificially produced vacuum would, due to its relative density, conduct heat much faster than the vacuum of space.

Since the greatest need of a vacuum would be while entering an atmosphere, why not have a valve in the outer shell of the ship which could be opened while in the vacuum of space and closed just before entering an atmosphere? This would give the ship a more perfect vacuum than a machine could possibly produce. Such a perfect vacuum would protect the space travelers much better than anything else that could be used.

In regard to the Smith-Robb controversy. I think that Dr. Smith's style of writing is very, very much better than any of his critics could do, but for the sake of being human, let's not pan Miss Robb any more. I think that she has had all that any human could do with.

And last but not least, let me say that I think that our magazine is the best ever written and that it is apt to be the best for some time. There are some of the stories that I like better than others, but there hasn't been one printed yet that I couldn't get a lot of enjoyment out of. I have been a reader ever since the first AMAZING STORIES magazine was printed, way back, and I think I ought to know.

Best of luck, and I hope that the A. S. radio programs will evolve. I can't imagine anything that would be nicer than to hear some of the best "amazing stories" dramatized.

James A. Lowe,
545 East 2nd Street,
Salt Lake City, Utah.

(We prefer to let this letter speak for itself. As an airplane or balloon rises in the air, the occupants feel the cold more and more for each increase of elevation. It seems rather illogical to suppose that if they went a few thousand feet higher they would have to discard their wrappings on account of the intense heat. We feel that the experience of aviators goes to refute the theory that the bodies in outer space would be hot. Making the space ship a hugh thermos bottle certainly would tend to assist in maintaining an even temperature within it.—EDITOR.)

SOME VERY DECIDED OPINIONS PRO AND CON ABOUT OUR MAGAZINE

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

After having just finished the second installment of "The Swordsman of Sarvon," I was prompted to write to you and compliment you on this remarkable story. It is indeed one of the best that you have ever published. It was different from the usual line of interplanetary stories. It is exciting and chock full of science, and shows a lot of thinking on the part of Mr. Cloukey. Outside of John W. Campbell, Jr.'s "Arcot and Morey" stories, I think it is the best story yet.

When I read "Solarite" I thought it was almost perfect. Later "The Black Star Passes" made me change my opinion. Then came the "perfect" story termed "Islands of Space" and along with it gobs of new science. It was by all means well high perfect. But "Invaders From the Infinite." It is impossible for me to comment on it. By all means Mr. Campbell is your best author. In the argument between Messrs. Campbell and Smith, Edward

Elmer Smith, Ph.D., doesn't even exist. John Campbell outshines Mr. Smith as the sun outshines a match. I wonder what Campbell's next "Arcot" story will be like. Here's hoping there will be one.

What happened to your artist supreme, Muller. Why in thunder do your other readers condemn him so? What's he done besides helping improve an almost perfect magazine? His art work is very clever and I see no reason for slinging mud at him. It's a cinch his drawings are better than Morey's. But while I'm praising Muller, I want to condemn Briggs. His drawing for "When the Inca-Land Revolted" was terrible. Let's have no more from him.

Well AMAZING STORIES is seven and a half years old and going strong on the upward grade. Here's more power to you.

F. Lewis Torrance,
503 College St.,
Winfield, Kansas.

P. S. Here's an idea. Why not have a page of scientific cartoons and jokes?

(We thank you for your good opinion of our stories. However, you should not say that we condemn the artist, Muller. We felt that he was condemned by our readers. The Editor certainly thought highly of him. The artist, Briggs, is definitely a cartoonist and that is why he gave such queer effects in his treatment of the story you refer to. The mistake was in giving the humorous touch, while the story was such a serious one. We have all sorts of hopes for the future and possibly something might be done in the line of cartoons that you suggest.—EDITOR.)

ANOTHER LETTER FROM MISS ROBB, AND ONE JUST AS NICE AS HER LAST, OPENING WITH A GOOD WORD FOR DR. SMITH

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

Doctor Smith, in his personal correspondence, is so charming, that I really feel quite ashamed of myself in having the temerity to send yet a further letter. I should have let matters rest where they were with my last, not that I am converted to Dr. Smith's way of thinking, far from it, but because I know that a man of his position has something better to do than to engage in a long correspondence with what to him and the rest of your readers is, after all, simply a nonentity.

However, in his personal letter to me, with advance copy of the chastisement he so ably administers with his carpet slipper, he invites me, if I have anything further to say, to carry on.

Whatever the general consensus of opinion, you can, I think, thank me for initiating a series of highly diverting and humorous letters from the worthy Doctor. This will, I hope, be my last contribution in the matter.

OLIVE ROBB,
29 Manor Row,
Bradford, England.

(We are more than delighted with this concluding letter from Miss Robb and we feel that Doctor Smith is a very much favored man in being a party to this most friendly and pleasantly conducted controversy. Miss Robb need not call herself a nonentity—her letters show her to have a fine personality and good literary ability, because she has put her case so very well. As for the series of highly diverting letters from the Doctor, we can assure you that we think your contribution to the controversy is equally admirable. We are very proud of the Discussions Columns of our magazine and you and Doctor Smith have made us prouder of it than ever, for on both sides there was real true matter in every word that was written. You have our sincere congratulations on what you have done. We shall hope for more letters for our Discussions from you.—EDITOR.)

THE ROBB-SMITH CONTROVERSY; A LETTER WHICH GIVES A CONCLUDING STATEMENT

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

Being a charter reader of your most excellent publication, for the past six years I have been enjoying myself immensely reading the various letters and opinions that have appeared by the million in the Discussions column. To date, I have missed no single controversy that has not been bitterly fought over.

Until a few months ago I was well content to write an opinion or two on the condition of the magazine, and contentedly watch the discussions for the bitter warfare that from time to time breaks out in defiance of the latest decisions of the League of Nations. To be truthful, I had given up everything, but the indolent pleasure of enjoying the gore (advisedly used) and blood for which your readers will be some day indicted for abusive criticism. However, the recent Robb-Smith battle, out of which the eminent doctor seemed to be rising victoriously, caught my attention, when Miss Robb's first letter protesting the use of slang was printed.

Speaking as one who can appreciate the use of good English, Miss Robb is absolutely right.

Speaking as one who can also appreciate the harmless use of slang in God's own country, may I say that Miss Robb is entirely wrong.

Miss Robb will be forced to admit that AMAZING STORIES is a publication printed by an American Company for the enjoyment of a large majority of the STF-loving American public.

Let Miss Robb think that I am being nationalistic, might I say that I am strongly pro-British.

For the past ten years or so, a sort of aggregation of certain sounds known as slang to the public; has been growing word by word in America, until the place of practically every well known object, thing, or man has been taken by a nickname, meaning exactly the same thing, but having entirely different sounds.

Also, for the past ten years, the American public has so imbibed these erratic noises that they form a part of everyday speech. For example, I myself would never think of expressing the word "money," except by a nickname (one of many) which is "dough." For the word liquor, I would naturally use "booze" or "hooch," and for "talking picture" I would say, "talkies." There are many others which would take up the space of this entire letter, if I cared to print them.

And, when I say the American public, I mean not only the masses, but also the higher ups, the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy, all of which use "slang" more or less to express themselves while talking.

Mr. (pardon me) Doctor Smith, imbibing for the same ten years the same slang, naturally to make himself better understood to AMAZING STORIES' intelligent readers who in the majority are undoubtedly overwhelmingly American, has used this new way of expressing one's self in his stories, which I find are delightfully refreshing after a solid six years of good, but too often stilted, English.

So, until some other good and honorable lover of the American language (and I didn't mean slang) puts forward another defence for the good Doctor Smith, I am retiring to my den, prepared, with meat and drink to see the last of the great struggle. I hope that my confinement is not long. With best wishes for the future.

JOHN O. MICHEL,
1094 New York Ave.,
Brooklyn, N. Y.

(This letter is very nice as closing the Robb-Smith controversy, our feeling in the matter of that controversy being that the two participants did great credit to themselves and while extremely courteous, it was observable that neither one of them yielded an iota to the other. Your letter enters the controversy by taking rather a moderate American view of slang. Personally, the writer thinks that there is too much slang used in common speech. We feel that Miss Robb has acquitted herself wonderfully and from our personal acquaintance with Dr. Smith, we are sure that he thoroughly enjoyed her letter. There is a light touch about it which was accounted for very nicely by Miss Robb when she divulged the fact that she had a lot of Irish blood in her, which, to our mind, accounts for the light way in which she held fast to her original opinion. We, personally, enjoyed this controversy greatly.—EDITOR.)

AN APPRECIATION FROM ACROSS THE OCEAN

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

I first became aware that your magazine existed about three years ago when I happened to buy a copy in Woolworth's Stores. Since then I have bought every copy I could obtain, both before and after the issue date of my initial purchase. However, I have not managed to get all the copies and I shall be glad if any-

body who has copies prior to 1929 for sale will let me know.

I read three different science fiction mags and this is how I grade them: 1. AMAZING STORIES has proved itself the science fiction mag supreme.

A. S. was first in the field and remains the first for you still have all the best authors in each type of story: Interplanetary—Dr. E. E. Smith, closely seconded by J. W. Campbell. Sociological—Dr. Keller with Breuer and Vincent not far behind. In fact the best authors of each particular class. With regard to stories I must second Mr. Herbst's appeal, nay demand, for sequels to "Tumithek of the Corridors" and also to "Skylark Three."

I can't agree with the people who assert that A. S. has degenerated, for I think that the present mag is a vast improvement over the original bone in every way.

I have just bought the second part of the "Metal Doom," for in England we get the A. S. three months late, but the "Metal Doom" looks like being one of the best stories that I have read equalling the "Skylark" stories in style and quality (what more can I say).

I hope you will publish this, my first letter to you, to enable me to make public my appreciation of your mag and also to help me get the back numbers that I want.

Wishing the continued success of your mag,
101 Stradella Road,
Herne Hill, S. E. 24,
London, England.

(We have accepted the correspondents' grateful compliment without comparing it with two others which are quoted in his letter. Your letter is very interesting because so specific and it gives us the view of the relative merits of our stories from a distant correspondent. Our idea is that English readers should subscribe. AMAZING STORIES is absolutely not degenerating and we are confident that the next few issues will even show an advance. The contrast between the early issues and the present ones is quite startling. The present ones are better in every possible way. If you will look through the Discussions for three or four issues back, we think you will have no difficulty in finding correspondents who can supply your wants and sell you the necessary copies.—EDITOR.)

DR. E. E. SMITH AND HIS STORY. A QUARTERLY FOR SALE

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

I have been reading Amazing Monthly and Quarterly for about 2 years and feel that it is about time I have my say. On the whole the stories have been good, and Smith, Campbell and Williamson are undoubtedly your best authors, while your 3 best stories have been, "Spacehounds of I. P. C.," "Invaders from the Infinite," and "The Stone from the Green Star." When are we going to be treated to another story by Dr. E. E. Smith?

I have an extra copy of the Spring-Summer edition of the Quarterly containing "Invaders from the Infinite," by Campbell, which I will sell to any reader for the regular price of \$.50 or exchange for a copy of the winter, 1932, Quarterly.

Hoping for Smith's stories in book form.

PAUL POULSEN,
19 Byron Ave.,
Ansonia, Conn.

(Dr. E. E. Smith has won a high reputation by his story and we are as anxious as you are to get another story from him. He has received great praise for his work and we still feel that it doubtful when it will be obtainable in book form. We hope that you will have no trouble in selling your copy of the Quarterly.—EDITOR.)

A CRITICISM OF THE STORY ENTITLED "A MATTER OF NERVES"

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

May I offer you a suggestion. Would you appeal to your literary subscribers to use a little logic. I have just read your edition of AMAZING STORIES containing "A Matter of Nerves." In this story, when the poor individual had his sensations of heat and cold reversed, he was ordered not to divest himself of his clothes in winter when he would feel very hot, but to keep them on for he would really catch a heavy cold if he left them off, for he

was really at the same temperature as anyone else. He must have been, for by the laws of heat and temperature, a hot body tends to give out heat to the surrounding atmosphere if the air were cooler; therefore if he were hot, almost roasting on a snowy day, he would soon be cool; N.B. It was only his sensations reversed, not the actual conditions. Again: He was seated in a park in mid-summer with a fur coat on, with blue fingers and chattering teeth. Now, would not a fur coat tend to make him warmer, and hence feel colder? Just think.

An Admirer of Logic,
New Zealand.

(We think that you must have noticed that we, in the Discussions Columns, accept criticism favorable and unfavorable, and while in many cases we dissent from our reader's views we seldom have occasion to apologize. The writer considered that the story you refer to was a particularly good one, and we can assure you that nerves are responsible for a multitude of sins, and do not follow the laws of correct science. In other words, you cannot look for logic in a sufferer in the all too common complaint—called for want of a better name, "nerves." The sufferer from "nerves" is the last person to look for logic. The asylums of this country are filled with sufferers of this type and they are certainly desperately illogical. You should always sign your name to your letter. If you do not wish it published we will carry out your desire.—EDITOR.)

A LETTER EMBODYING TWO QUESTIONS

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

While looking over a February, 1932, issue of AMAZING STORIES, I read a letter by Bob Kirk that inspired me to write this one. The first thing I want to do is ask you two questions. The first is: When are you going to reprint the "Skylark of Space" and "Skylark Three" in book form?

I can vaguely remember "Skylark of Space" from four years ago, but that isn't enough. I'll have to read it over and over again, before I can appreciate it fully.

The second question is: Are we going to have a sequel to "Tumithak of the Corridors"? The story is only half finished as it is, and believe me, that's some story.

Well, now as I close, I'll tell you that I'm 14 years old so you can figure out how old I was when I started reading AMAZING STORIES.

BOB HEIMERL,
980 W. 5th Avenue,
Pomona, Calif.

(We do not know when the stories you refer to will be published in book form. It has been taken into consideration already. "Tumithak of the Corridors" we think is entitled to a sequel and we hope that the author will see fit to send us one soon. Your letter may inspire him to write one.—EDITOR.)

A YOUNG READER'S COMMENTS. FAVORABLE AND THE REVERSE

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

I am an old reader of your mag. and have never found anything wrong in the way that I just had to blow up and tell you all about it, till now, and it occurred as soon as I finished that outlandish "fairy tale," "Lady of the Light." Please don't misunderstand my comment on this story, but really all through the story I could not get the thought out of my head, whether I was reading an Amazing Story or some wild epic of "Anderson's Fairy Tales," in fact I was waiting for the whole thing to turn out in a dream of some "feeble-minded" person.

I don't mind a far-fetched story with a scientific background but this as I said was a mere fairy tale and is not the kind of stories we re-read the mag. for. On the other hand "Suicides Durkees Last Ride" was an excellent story. It was different.

I am very much interested in chemistry and the aspects of interplanetary travel, anyone near my age (14) who would be interested in corresponding with me will be answered pronto.

Lloyd Merryfield,
449 S. Orange Drive,
Los Angeles, Calif.

(We always consider ourselves fortunate when we get a story by the author of "The

Lady of Light." We have published several stories just as fairy-like as this, without evolving unfavorable criticism and we cannot but feel that you admired the story in itself, whatever you thought about its having a place in this magazine. J. Williamson is an author of very high reputation, and we hope that he will long be with us, if we may so express it.—EDITOR.)

BACK COPIES FOR SALE

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

For the benefit of readers desiring back copies, I have a complete set of back issues which I will sell either singly or in bulk for their face value, twenty-five cents.

R. C. MAINFORD,
305 Braddock St.,
Alexandria, Va.

(You will find in our "Discussions" a number of correspondents who want to buy back numbers and if you will consult three or four previous issues of AMAZING STORIES, we are confident that you will find several customers for your copies.—EDITOR.)

NOTES ON SOME RECENT STORIES AND CRITICISMS ON THE ILLUSTRATIONS

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

The conclusion of "The Swordsman of Sarvon" by Charles Cloukey is very good. It had a fine ending. Tell Mr. Cloukey to write a sequel to it.

"Space Rocket Murders" by Edmund Hamilton is his most "different" story. I enjoyed every page of it.

The rest of the stories in order of merit are:

3. "Wrath of the Purple." 4. "The Man Who Fought a Fly." 5. "The Great Invasion of 1955." 6. "The First Martian." 7. "Infra-Calorescence."

The last two stories were too scientific. They contained too much scientific explanation. Morey's cover is fairly good, but the best drawing is the one illustrating "The First Martian."

The paper in the October issue is too bulky. It is almost as thick as the paper used in the last issue of the Quarterly.

Jack Darrow,
4224 N. Sawyer Ave.,
Chicago, Ill.

(This letter speaks for itself; your objection to scientific explanation is curious because it is exactly that which we are striving to get into our columns.—EDITOR.)

A PLEA FOR SCIENCE FICTION BASED ON VERY GOOD PHILOSOPHY

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

I am writing to you for the first time to get a load off my mind. Science-fiction is the only type of reading that can satisfy my desire to get out of our present day "civilization". Oh, if Man could only rid himself of his colossal egotism! He says he is intelligent! Then he immediately yells for beer and whiskey which ruin his body more slowly, but just as surely as opium! Intelligent? Bah! He thinks he is civilized, then he storms into a convention, half drunk, screaming and shrieking like a savage—all of this to nominate a man to rule millions of people—in fact to control the destiny of a great nation! Civilized? Again—Bah!

As I have said, science-fiction takes me away from this age to delightful adventures in future and perhaps better eras.

And then some smart alec writes an article in one of our science magazines (he was afraid to put it in a science-fiction magazine) entitled: "Most Science-Fiction Can't Come True!" He picks out two or three incidents in the stories that he has read (he's read perhaps one or two, it seems). He shows the impossibility of time-traveling. Everyone knows that. He shows us (theoretically) the impossibility of changing a man's body into electrical waves and sending it to another place and re-assembling it. This is quite improbable but it is not against any law of nature that I know of. He mentions the impossibility of living on the moon (no atmosphere)—this from the picture, "The Girl in the Moon." Well, who said life could exist there and—who knows? And

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Says O. W. DEAN

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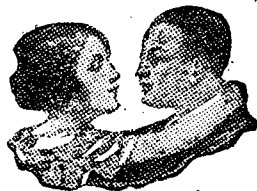
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is this the major part of science-fiction—hal—only the minor part!

What are some of the things we read in many of the stories? Death Rays! Here is a clipping under a photo that I cut from our local newspaper: "Concentrated Death—Kurt E. Schinkus, German inventor, with the permission of the German government, is showing his chemical death ray machine to military officials in the United States." Enough said!

And how about atomic power? I have a clipping stating that Dr. Fritz Lange and Dr. Arno Brasch have split five atoms and released four times as much electrical energy as was used in releasing it. (2,500,000 volts used, and about 8,000,000 volts released!)

And what about airplanes that rise vertically, hover, and descend vertically? I have a recent clipping about an Austrian engineer, Dr. Raimund Nimfuehr, who has invented what he calls a "whirling plane," which will do the above mentioned and will therefore revolutionize flying. He has already sold stock amounting to \$13,000.

And there is our visual-audio apparatus—television!

We all know of the work of the American Interplanetary Society and the European societies in Germany, Austria, Russia, and France.

Sol Science-fiction—most of it—can't come true! Eh?—Bah!

I could go on forever with proofs—for instance: I see where scientists have discovered carbon-dioxide on Venus—that gives us more life necessities on that planet—moisture, heat, and carbon dioxide!

Well, I feel better now. Morey has improved immensely. His covers are the best of any of the sciencefiction magazines. E. E. Smith is your best author!

Clay Ferguson, Jr.,
810 Park St., S. W.,
Roanoke, Virginia.

(A very severe criticism of the present day and some curious views about what the world is doing are here. This letter will speak for itself. The writer we find is not afraid to express his opinion. The inner sense may be pronounced as radical, but it is a good kind of "radical." He sees the folly of the world and the crime as we may call it of humanity at large. The world is now getting so high-brow with passports, quotas, discriminating tariffs and expensive governments, that it is hard to see how it will ever pull out of its present trouble. Many things which are everyday achievements were considered absolutely impossible by leading scientists in the past. This has happened often enough to make people slow in denying the possibility of advancements. We do not know what is coming in the future—not even in the near future. And yet in the light of all this progress, man wants to hold himself prepared to destroy his fellow man by firearms and lethal gas.—EDITOR.)

SOME NOTES ON TWO OF OUR RECENT STORIES

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

I have been reading your magazine for only about a year and a half, but I am an enthusiastic booster of A. S. At least 95% of your stories are good and although there are some bad ones in the other 5%, the "mag" as a whole is one that can't be beat.

I have just finished the September number and as usual all the stories are good. I liked the "Romance of Posi and Nega" the best. After finishing the second part of the "Swordman of Sarvon" I have a question I would like to be answered. The machine which is in the hands of Izanne, who was Laura Ives on earth, that was invented by her brother, enables a person to walk through solid walls. Why then, when this machine is turned on, does not the person immediately drop through the floor? It seems as though the force exerted by a person walking forward is not greater than the force of his weight against the floor. This story is a good one and I especially like the description of the various machines.

Well, here's good luck to A. S. and keep up the good work in securing good stories.

TURNER N. WILEY,
Columbus, Ohio.

(It does not rest with an Editor to make comparisons; different readers have different

ideas and preferences, and our work is to satisfy as many of them as possible. If you read the "Discussions" letters you will find that we are not always successful in our efforts to please. This is said in reference to the "Romance of Posi and Nega." If a scientific fiction story fails to be literature, it is a fatal blench and certainly the above story has every claim to literary merit as well as being a depiction of the movement of electrons. You are a little severe in your criticism on the machine that enables a person to walk through solid walls. As the idea of the machine is pure fiction there is no need of putting a limit on its capabilities and restrictions.—EDITOR.)

A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR OF THE TIME TRAVELLER—A SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

May I, as editor of The Time Traveller, science fiction's only fan magazine, express the appreciation of all our readers for the splendid array of scientific fiction offered by AMAZING STORIES during the past few months?

With such superb writers as Hamilton, Breuer, Vincent, Keller, Olsen, Williamson and other leading authors appearing regularly in your pages, there can be no question that AMAZING STORIES is the premier as well as the pioneer sciencefiction magazine.

Because of this preeminence in its field, we especially wish to enlist the aid of AMAZING STORIES' many followers in our efforts to popularize science fiction with the millions who are as yet unaware of its existence.

If you will be kind enough to place this letter before your readers. We invite them to communicate with us at once.

ALLEN GLASSER,
Editor, The Time Traveller,
1610 University Avenue,
New York, N. Y.

(We are glad to publish this letter as the Editor appreciates our work and has made a very good selection of our writers. It will be observed that he is not at all exclusive, but says there are many others whose names he does not give.—EDITOR.)

A VERY CHEERFUL LETTER FROM ANTIPODES

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

In the first place I am not writing this to see it in print, you can tear this up for ticker tape confetti, as soon as you read it, if you do read it. To all those readers of this letter, who write such destructive instead of constructive criticism, I say—why not try yourselves to write even a paragraph?

A free lance journalist's career can easily be attempted and I think many of your destructive critics are a little imbued with envy due to non-success.

My own experience has shown to me how there is no perfection in anything. Had you decreased the size of A. S. you would have been perhaps a little further from perfection than my typewriting is.

To my way of thinking a special copy of all scientific publications should be filed for posterity.

Talkies have not exploited the realm of interplanetary subjects sufficiently, and I wonder if you use the radio to further interest in subjects not usually sent out over national networks.

Your authors are beyond criticism, they are all, in their own section, brainy. My suggestion is that your authors answer those who criticize them. Then the authors' answers could be criticized and a good time would be had by all except the editor who lost readers. I don't know what your readers expect for their cash. We pay double here what your readers pay in the U.S.A. and then some.

I could have written you a good deal of flattery but I do say in conclusion that your authors compare favorably with many Australasian authors who write on similar lines.

Your magazine finds its way here into high class libraries and newsstands.

Gilbert Hayman,
Monmouth 166, Macpherson St.,
Bronte, N.S.W., Australia.

(We certainly appreciate what you say about destructive criticism. Some like one story and some like another.

You will be interested in knowing that a story from our pages has been purchased for production on the screen by one of the principal companies in America. There seems to be now a ray of light in the future, as if the world was going to recover from the effects of the insane World War. It does not look now as if war had ennobled any of the participants as Mr. Mussolini says it does. Your little resumé of the standing of our magazine in Australia is quite delightful—Editor.)

WHY THE NORTH STAR APPEARS TO REMAIN FIXED IN THE NORTH AT ALL TIMES

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

I would appreciate your advising me through your "Discussions" column why the North Star appears to remain fixed in our North at all times. The answer is probably obvious as I do not recall having seen this query answered in your magazine during the years I have been reading it.

D. C. Place,
Lakeview Degraff, Ohio.

(As the Earth moves through its orbit, the position of its axis, whose ends are the north and south poles in the usual phraseology, holds an almost uniform position with respect to the plane of its orbit. In other words, the north and south axis always point in approximately the same direction. This direction is practically not absolutely the same but the North Star is so very remote that the diameter of the Earth's orbit is virtually a zero quantity to it. The North Star is so situated in space that the prolongation of the axis of the earth would come very close to it. As far as the Star is concerned, its position with reference to the prolongation of the Earth's axis varies but little. Owing to the Earth's rotation on its axis, it apparently moves in a circle of very small radius about the point of the heavens representing the true North.—Editor.)

NOTES ON REPRINTS AND A COMPLIMENT TO DR. SMITH. A NEW SCIENCE CLUB FOR YOUNG MEMBERS

Editor, AMAZING STORIES:

Why do people like Henry Hasse want reprints? If he wants them, why not read some worse scientific-fiction magazine that will print them? It is such people as Henry Hasse that destroy morale by being a pessimist. Every issue of AMAZING STORIES can't suit everybody, but those that every issue doesn't suit set up a howl.

The best of your authors by far is Edward E. Smith and I am sure that the majority of your readers agree with me. Next comes John W. Campbell, Jr. After him comes Dr. Keller. His last story, "The Metal Doom," was good, but he has done better. Francis Flagg comes next and others follow in "decreasing dimensions". Somehow, I can't stand John Taine's stories, but I am so well satisfied with the others, that I won't complain.

Now after giving a little amateur criticism of your (pardon me, "our") magazine, may I make an announcement? It is regarding a Science Club. Its name is the Edison Science Correspondence Club. The age limits are from 12 to 18. It is open to either sex. There are no dues as yet.

A club paper is published each month in which there are stories, articles, and poems by members.

The club has been in formation for some time but public announcement is just being made. Anyone may join by sending his or her name and address to me or to Carl Johnson, 129 Campbell St., Danville, Va. There is absolutely no charge and no dues or other charge will be made except with full consent of the members. The club is also open to foreign members, who will enjoy the same privileges as members in America.

E. C. Love, Jr.,
106 N. Jackson Street,
Quincy, Florida.

(Dr. Smith has certainly one great favor with our readers. The same is to be said of the other authors whom you name. We take pleasure in publishing the announcement of your new club and we certainly wish you every success in your effort.—Editor.)

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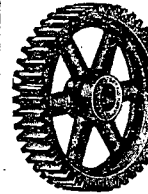
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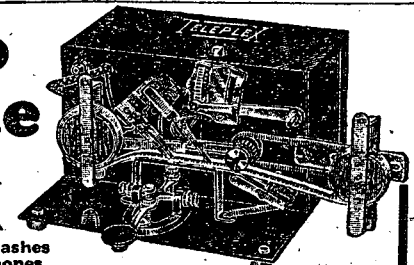
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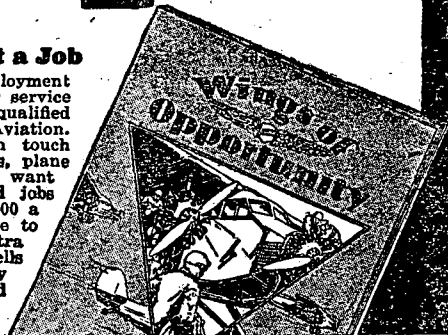


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